Classifying the Subaltern: In the Margins of Documentation

How do I prove this or that person is not an Indian national? *Mathe pe to nahin likha hoga?* (It’s not written on your forehead, no?) I couldn’t be sure they were Bangladeshis and therefore I couldn’t discriminate against them.

- *Jadeja, a retired food official in the Food and Civil Supplies Department.*

In postcolonial Delhi, various documents of identification complemented and jostled with each other to produce viable taxonomies of subjects residing in the margins. The enumeration of marginal subjects was made possible by republican instruments like census records and election cards on the one hand, and welfare practices like the ration card, on the other. This chapter shows how narratives of various documents in marginal spaces frame the productive tensions of postcolonial modernity. Through their spheres of circulation and intersection, documents could suspend the claims and entitlements of marginal subjects within one system of identification in favour of another. Documents like census records and ration cards could delegitimize a certain form of identity of the marginal subject and privilege another.

Postcolonial power was wielded through recurring performances of welfare distribution, whether it be the rehabilitation of the refugee subject, the legalization of slum residences or the creation of housing for the socially and economically backward sections. The vast postcolonial economy of welfare entitlement functioned as a documentary edifice churning and shredding paper. Receiving welfare in this economy was possible only through a series of demonstrations and representations for all classes of subjects. The identification document was completed by certain markers of identity within a document like the fingerprint or the signature, certain insignia of bureaucratic legitimacy like a seal, symbol or official signature and administrative properties like the serial number, date of issue of a document, etc. When a refugee subject or a squatter was in possession of a document where her signature was smudged or when the census enumerated her as a resident of a *pukka* house instead of a *kutcha* house at a certain

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1Here, I loosely use the term ‘subaltern’ to mean marginal and underrepresented subjects who have had to encounter debilitating social and economic deprivation.

2Name changed. This statement was recorded in an interview held in February 2011.

3By republican instruments, I mean practices that help enumerate the population as a whole and produce the republic. The decennial census enumerating householders and homeless alike may be distinguished from the squatters’ census which counts only those residing in slum settlements.
point of time, her document threatened to jeopardize her entitlement and compromise her identity. When certain representations (ownership documents, for instance) were difficult to demand and sustain from certain classes, like the class of the slum resident, they were replaced by other paper protocols (affidavits). This chapter tries to capture the highly contingent benchmarks of identity and eligibility that documents spawn. It (the chapter) argues that documents set up and undermine intricate taxonomies of identity and entitlement of marginal subjects. These taxonomies which often conflicted with each other were to the effect of laying down the parameters of a stable residence and legal criteria of entitlement. As these taxonomies clashed often and colluded at other times, the end result was the failure of postcolonial authorities to institute structured and legally tenable systems of identification. This dissertation however suggests that this failure was kind to the marginal subject who benefited from the ambiguities in legal norms of stable residence.

This chapter outlines the social life of enumerative and documentary practices post independence around the tentative subjects of Delhi who stay in temporary, makeshift settlements like slum residents of various occupations (labourers, tailors, cobblers, housemaids) and those who sleep in enclosed or open public spaces like beggars, vendors, ragpickers, small shopkeepers, etc. In India, the category of the ‘houseless’, historically speaking, is heterogeneous, amorphous and nebulous; at one point, it even comprised refugees from Pakistan and later Bangladesh. Yet, these classes of the subaltern though in many ways dissimilar, spilled into each other both through their documentary experiences and through their incomplete claims to citizenship.

The narratives of this chapter draw on a variety of ethnographic material like census questionnaires, ration cards, beggars’ permits, refugee certificates; and official documents like judgments, Control Orders, Acts, Manuals, judgments, and interviews with food

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4Such an argument can of course, only be relative. This chapter is replete with illustrations where ambiguities in legal yardsticks of stable residence entailed protracted court cases for the refugee resident. Similarly, the squatter who could not prove legal residence owing to such ambiguity was often in danger of running into preying officials who intimidated, coerced and extorted them. In the longer run however, this dissertation argues, that ambiguity worked in favour of the marginal subject.
officials\textsuperscript{5} to capture the idiomatically and administratively distinct standards of enumeration and treatment of the various classes of urban poor in Delhi. This chapter must be read as a preamble to the following chapter which is a field and case study of documentary practices in a slum cluster in South Delhi. Rather than list chronologically the various documentary initiatives and interventions surrounding subaltern classes, this chapter will organize and intersperse its material around three crucial moments of regulating these subjects in Delhi, namely, the Partition, the 1971 war and the creation of Bangladesh, and the Emergency. If earlier, this dissertation delineated the life of the ration card in various narratives such as the colonial war effort, scarcity and encounters with malpractice, it attempts, in this chapter and the next, to trace the trajectories of the ration card in various debates on citizenship, entitlement and residence in the city.

**Idiom and Enumeration**

Narrative, idiom and aesthetic deployment are as central to census enumeration as facts, numbers, graphs and empirical detail. If Arjun Appadurai writes to describe numbers in the colonial imagination\textsuperscript{6}, their antithesis, idioms were not absent in the postcolonial imagination. This chapter seeks to dispel myths about enumeration being a clinical and unimaginative administrative exercise. Here the crucial point is not about the consequence, the agenda or the import of census but the content or the substance of census documents.

The previous chapter recorded documentary practices of price display, catering and guest arrangements, tyre tube restrictions and control of rationed commodities surrounding a middle-class, urban and at times affluent and elite population. It was possible to deduce from a series of interviews with food officials, that weddings that take place in a slum settlement are low-key affairs, underreported\textsuperscript{7} and of relative

\textsuperscript{5}These interviews were conducted in February, March and April 2011. I have changed the names of officials as well as the sources they interviewed.


\textsuperscript{7}The Food Inspector had many means of knowing about a wedding – either through the hosts themselves who anyway had to apply for permission by submitting copies of the invitation card and the ration card or through a third party (usually known to the hosts) who tipped off the Inspector about the wedding.
indifference to the establishment. Many of such residents as the case study in a slum cluster shows, previous to 1990 (see next chapter) were only marginally aware of ration card application processes and possessed a ration card irregularly (for infrequent periods of time) or none at all. Few Food Inspectors stepped into slums before 1990 to enumerate the houseless for purposes of issuing a ration card. “Homeless persons” as they were called in food legislations on the other hand were only issued temporary documents that were rarely renewed, as I will demonstrate. It was highly unlikely, in the estimation of food officials, that a slum resident or a beggar could hoard foodgrains or rationed commodities for a wedding or a funeral through the Fair Price Shop whose timings and whose functioning in these shops were, prior to 1990, also highly irregular. The Delhi Guest Control Orders turned on regulations of enumerated ration card-holders rendering the inspection of weddings in slums and of slum residents an administrative obscurity.

The story of Surinder in the previous chapter who attempted to conceal the inclusion of his name in his father’s ration card, manipulate rationing regulations and intimidate the food official was starkly middle class as he cites his “influence” and flaunts his father’s political credentials. Intimidations, coercions and threats of violence to acquire a ration card were not absent among the urban poor but the idioms employed therein were strikingly different. Let me illustrate this difference with a story where slum residents used coercive methods to get a ration document. A Food Inspector who was in charge at the time that ration cards were distributed to jhuggi jhonpri residents during VP Singh’s drive to enumerate all such residents in Delhi (the focus of the following chapter) narrated this story.

Some of the slum residents near Irwin Hospital seized records of ration card holders and captured staff from the Food and Supplies Department. Each of these residents who were behind the kidnapping wanted 5 ration cards (a rough number) each even though any given slum resident owned or stayed in 1 jhuggi. They would show me different rooms, put a stove in each room and claim that each room was a separate jhuggi. When I and other food officials refused to issue more than 1 ration card to them, they became violent and kidnapped my men. We were worried more about the records than the men. Aadmi ka parva nahiin tha, but if they got hold of the records and fabricated them, then it would have been a bigger problem. I threatened a woman who ran a mithi tel (kerosene
oil) depot who I knew was close to these men that I would conduct a raid on her depot unless she convinced the men to return the records and my men.

The food official who told this story had to leave at this point so I never got to know if he got the records and his relatively insignificant aadmi back. But this story could never be a middle class urban narrative involving coercion and intimidation given the images that it conjures – of the uncomfortable proximity of houses in slum settlements where one house could be mistaken to be or correctly estimated to be two or three houses and where a single house of 1 or two rooms may well be home to more than 4 residents, hence the need for more than 1 ration card per house. Let me now conjure three moments of enumeration of the marginal subjects of Delhi post-independence.

The Partition

*This is not that Dawn*, the English translation of *Jhootha Sach* is a novel by Yashpal set before, during and after the constitutive moment of nation-making, namely the Partition featuring hundreds of characters, some fictional and others historical. The book set before the Partition in Lahore and after the Partition across a dizzying profusion of cities like Jallandar, Amritsar, Delhi, Lucknow, Simla tracks the lives of its protagonists uprooted from their homes in jobs and locales where they are witness to and at times in a position to influence crucial political decisions like settlement of evacuee property (both domestic property and agricultural land), the recovery of abducted women, abolition of privy purses, compensation for political sufferers during British rule, nationalization of industries, etc. One such dilemma was the continuation of ration support for refugees housed in camps in independent India. One of the first documents the novel records refugees to have been issued in independent India was the ration card. In Jalandhar, in fact, the very first order that a new printing press that starts business after the Partition receives is a bulk order for ration cards. In the relief camps in Delhi, ration cards entitled the cardholder to grains, rotis and roasted grams and sometimes blankets. These ration cards, as a character in the novel complains bitterly, did not entitle them to spices or firewood, leaving them to beg,

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8Yashpal, *This is not that Dawn*, (Penguin: New Delhi, 2010), 506.
spend their limited resources or steal to acquire these necessities to cook a meal. Refugee settlement authorities and the Prime Minister are loath to continue these rations for more than a month, believing that it would engender parasitic dependence on state charity. Rehabilitation initiatives of offering land, loans and assistance in employment were often discussed by ministers in the context of shutting down relief camps and ending the massive government expense in feeding and clothing refugees. Nehru and the Home Secretary in the novel both endorse the view that the state could not allow refugees to stay as “permanent non-paying guests” in the country. They also suspected the increasing clamour on the part of refugees for rations to reflect their desires to stay back in Delhi even though they were offered land and accommodation in other places like Okhla and Neelokheri.

The question of ‘residence’, in this case, resettlement was all-important to state authorities undertaking rehabilitation and equally so to the refugee seeking to become a local in Delhi. The identity of the homeless refugee-resident who occupied land in Delhi never stopped being nebulous decades after she or he had been displaced – it was contested in disparate discursive spaces such as in census documents, refugee records, claim applications and DDA files and interrogated time and again in an unfolding narrative of “border-making” and citizenship. Border-making characterizes the discursive process after Partition of the making of nation-states. This process was fulfilled through the entrenchment of (what used to be the tentative) boundaries of India and Pakistan through such practices as passports, permits and evacuee property settlement. Rehabilitation efforts also acquired a currency in a discourse of “disciplining of place” where evacuee property settlement as well as the citizenship claims of the refugee were hinged on intricate documentary practice. Definitions of refugees, never the same across time and space, were ensnared in criss-
crossing disputes across various sites of housing, compensation, rehabilitation, rationing and census enumeration. Before we enter this maze of documentary practice to see how the conceptual categories of “residence” and a “resident” of Delhi were constituted and contested, it is important that we reflect on the privileged role that the state played in welfare distribution post the Partition.

The Partition rendered the state a powerful and “the largest owner of real estate” in places like Delhi and Punjab largely owing to the role it assumed as custodian of evacuee properties or immovable properties in the nature of houses, workshops, factories, shops and agricultural lands. This role initially vacillated between preserving this property for until such evacuees returned to reclaim it and using this property to provide housing protection to the displaced who had lost their assets in Pakistan. But later, owing to fallouts with Pakistan over financial settlements surrounding the relative value of the properties and the comparative proportions of the displaced population in India and national demands to compensate refugees who were uprooted from Pakistan, this role of Custodian crystallized into one that distributed evacuee property to the dispossessed displaced persons in India. In a place like Delhi, the resettlement of refugees was all the more strained as “for every two Muslims who left India, at least three Hindus and Sikhs came in from Pakistan”. One scholar describes in detail the claim application process which she characterizes as partial to those of a certain class or those with financial means which was measured in terms of those who could afford their own rations in refugee camps. In particular, she describes the silent exclusion of “the homeless and poor migrants” from housing protection in Delhi through a scheme of compensation tied to the declaration of properties and the size of the plot left behind in West Punjab. And even for those who fit into such brackets of eligible refugees, the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation that was in charge of dispensing the claims took 10 to 15 years to examine each claim. This scholar writes, “Such persons had to submit identity card numbers of refugee registration, the nature of family organization in Pakistan (joint or nuclear),

16Vazira Zamindar, 188-190.
17U.Bhaskar Rao, The Story of Rehabilitation as cited by Ravinder Kaur, 99
receipt of refugee maintenance allowance from the state, any debts owed to the state before migration, date of arrival, proof of residence in refugee camp, any independent exchange of property in Pakistan with that in India, claim to ownership of property, type and description of property, and location of the property in Pakistan. She goes on to describe the arbitrary distinction sustained while providing housing between different classes of the displaced: cheap colonies catering to poorer migrants were provided housing with basic civic facilities while the more financially sound refugees many of whom could manipulate the application process were given accommodation in well-provided colonies.

Let me now look closely at a couple of judgments involving Partition displaced persons who were eligible for state rehabilitation schemes for refugees from West Punjab. These urban poor subjects were equally embroiled in documentary procedures and contrary definitions of residence as their more affluent refugee counterparts.

Claims to housing and the policy of determining entitlement to housing post the Partition turned significantly on various proofs of residence, the ration card being foremost. What is significant in some housing disputes (that were disposed of in the Delhi High Court) was that the arbitrating housing authority, in this case, the DDA attempted to deny claims of housing owing to the nebulous status of residence in the various documents submitted – no one document was decisive in proving residence and the collective proof of various documents was untenable even when a single document was suspect. The ration card stands out as a prominent residence proof in these disputes but its function was never the same. At times, it demonstrated the identity of the applicant, at other times, the ration card corroborated his continuous occupation of a residence and at other times, it was a proof unto itself where its legality or fraudulence was cited. In the last sense, every detail in the ration card, whether it pertained to abstract codes, the year of issue, the signature inscribed, or the exact address, mattered in the sense that it could impinge on a claim for housing entitlement. Post-independence, the future of any number of squatters and in this instance, refugee

Ibid, 102
squatters in Delhi hung delicately on their ability to produce sturdy, legible, appropriate ration cards. The disputes outlined here, though they pertain to Partition-displaced persons are not centred around evacuee property, like the examples that some Partition scholars like Vazira Zamindar and Ravinder Kaur offer but concern the regularization of plots occupied by poor Partition-displaced persons on government land.

The disputes discussed here take place between Partition-displaced persons and the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) over claims to housing under the Gadgil Assurance Scheme. The Government of India had set up a Committee under the Chairmanship of N.V.Gadgil to determine the criteria for allotment of alternative plots to those who fled from Pakistan during the Partition of India and settled in Delhi on government land. The Committee evolved various categories of entitlement to housing, those who set up residence in Delhi prior to 15th August 1950 were accorded the highest priority under Category A, those who occupied premises after 15th August 1950 were deemed category B and those who were squatting on such land after 1960 and after 1980 formed two more categories, C and D. They were allotted plots of varying acreage depending on the category which their claims were determined to fall under, with Category A deserving the most substantial plot size. The allotment of plots under any of these categories depended on the claimant’s ability to convince the various Committees appointed of their eligibility through their documents like refugee registration certificate, ration card, electric, water supply, telephone bills, census slips, Voters’ list, etc.

The ration card featured as defence in both the petitioner and the respondent’s cases in the first dispute presented here. The petitioner was one Nand Kishore who was occupying a Category A plot in Western Extension Area Karol Bagh and sought sanction of the same and the respondent was DDA which allotted him a plot under Category C. He filed a writ petition in Court in 1984 when the DDA arbitrarily raised the damages he had to pay from 4.50 rupees to 450 rupees for the 90 square yards he was occupying under category A. Nand Kishore died during the course of the settlement of his plea and his wife, Darshna Devi had to take his place as petitioner. The petitioner managed to convince

\[19\] 142 (2007) DLT 474, Darshna Devi And Anr. vs Delhi Development Authority in Delhi High Court. on 20 April, 2007
successfully various authorities of his claim (a Committee appointed for the purpose and the Permanent Lok Adalat (PLA) of the DDA) over a long period of time. These authorities had perused Nand Kishore’s documents – mainly a refugee certificate and two ration cards and decided that he was a *bona fide* case for a Category A plot. However, the petitioner’s claim was cancelled on a complaint received that the refugee certificate that he had submitted was issued in the name of Nand Kishore’s father who was the head of the family and who had been given an alternative plot in a *jhuggi* in Karol Bagh. Surely then, Nand Kishore could not claim another plot on the same certificate, argued Harbans Singh, Secretary of the West Pakistan Refugee Association in his complaint. But the PLA of the DDA countered this complaint and deemed Nand Kishore’s wife, Darshna to be eligible by arguing that Nand Kishore was living separately in another *jhuggi* at the time of applying and produced two ration cards as proof, one issued in 1948 and another in 1950. The matter was settled temporarily with the petitioner making a compromise and accepting allotment under Category B in the interests of speedy settlement and the PLA strongly recommending her case for the same though it recognised her claim to a plot under Category A. However, the DDA failed to even allot her this much and the case came up again in Court, with the DDA submitting in its defence that the ration card of 1950 cannot be relied upon, as the administrative code within the card did not match with the first ration card of 1948. If the petitioner produced two ration cards, each serving two different functions, the first demonstrating occupation in Delhi and the second showing continuous residence in Delhi, the second was not valid as it showed the petitioner to be residing somewhere other than in the original residence, argued the respondent. The DDA argued that it could not allot either category A or B plots because the petitioner did not submit the Voters’ List of 1951 and also because he did not have a refugee certificate in his own name. The second ration card went against the petitioner’s case. The Court ultimately disposed of the petition in favour of Darshna Devi in 2007 two decades after the case came up for hearing in the High Court the first time in 1984. The Court ruled that the petitioner’s claim was to be entertained on grounds that the DDA ignored the decisions made by previous authorities in whose proceedings the DDA itself participated and needlessly re-perused documents whose credibility had already been established.
In yet another dispute that reached the High Court, a three-member committee formed by the DDA refused to accept the petitioner’s ration card as proof of ‘time’ in relation to occupation of residence. In other words, the ration card submitted by the petitioner as proof that he had occupied the house before August 1950 could not be regarded as valid because the date looked smudged on the document. The High Court dismissed DDA’s plea faulting it for privileging the ration card along with other documents ‘which were only meant to corroborate the true identity of persons’ when all that should have mattered was the refugee certificate and its veracity.\(^20\)

One can underplay the role of documents by casting aspersions on DDA’s integrity that it just brought up and kept re-opening all these documents just to be able to deny a plot. While this may be true, going along this line would only be pitting surmise against surmise. Instead, it may be possible to infer a couple of things about the ration card in particular, by assuming for a minute that DDA’s intentions in exploring all these documents were not suspect. Within the scope of these disputes, the ration card’s function was never the same, at times it sought to establish the identity of the claimant, at other times it testified to the linearity of events and at other times, it sought to verify address. But in a broader sense, these disputes demonstrated a couple of things – one, the illegibility of entitlement as it was never clear which documents clinched the claimant’s entitlement to the plot. Secondly, it showed that the document enjoyed currency in different debates which had nothing to do with the distribution of rations because the card embodied material aspects such as the signature or the fingerprint, address and family in a unitary evidentiary form. The ration card circulated in various “spheres of exchange”\(^21\) such as the withdrawal of rations, corroboration of eligibility and the verification of truth claims. At times, the ration card was privileged for the light it threw on the veracity of the petitioner’s claims like the date and place of occupation of government land. The administering authority, in

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this case, the DDA constantly assigned a “value order”\textsuperscript{22} to the identification document. The document was at times useful to establish the credibility of the petitioner’s claims and at other times, to verify his identity. The DDA arbitrarily shifted the spatial locus of eligibility from one kind of document to another, from one aspect of any given document to another. If a republican document like the Voter’s card established national identity and hence qualified the candidate, it became suspect when it was not complemented by a specific ration card which was assumed to be a more accurate description of regional residence (in Delhi). This ambiguity in fixing the locus of identity owing to the tension between republican and region-specific documents is rampant in DDA deliberations and eventually, the Court cases.

Apart from the ration card, the two other documents perused with a keen eye were the refugee certificate and the census slip as both these testified to the crucial moment of arrival of the refugee. The 1951 census includes a definition of the displaced person as “any person, who has entered India having left or being compelled to leave his home in Western Pakistan on or after the 15th October 1946 on account of civil disturbances or on account of the setting up of the 2 dominions of India and Pakistan”.\textsuperscript{23} In determining the place of residence of the subject, the 1951 census adds the question, “Are you a displaced person from Pakistan? If so, when did you arrive in India from Pakistan and what was your original district in Pakistan?”\textsuperscript{24} The time of arrival was to be recorded accurately and for children of displaced persons born after their arrival in India, the district of origin in Pakistan of their parents was to be recorded. This question was posed only to displaced persons from Pakistan. These census entries or slips were critical pieces of evidence in the housing disputes discussed.

It must be specified here that these disputes related to housing schemes were somewhat different from those undertaken by the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation. The Gadgil Assurance Scheme was targeted at lower-class refugee migrants from West Pakistan who had by themselves occupied land, had been paying damages and who wished to get

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid, 76.
\textsuperscript{23}Definition of 1951 census as cited in the \textit{Census of India, 1961}, (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1966), 127.
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid, 127
alternative plots. The DDA appointed a committee to look into encroachments and make allotments accordingly, with one plot to be allotted per person paying damages to the DDA. In case more than one family resided at the same place, and they were also displaced squatters or the original squatters, each of them was considered eligible for a built up home/plot based on the income group and the market rate as fixed by the DDA. The refugees covered by the rehabilitation schemes under the Ministry, on the other hand, were given plots in various resettlement colonies based on the value and size of the properties they owned back in Pakistan. These schemes covered various classes, affluent and poor – some refugee colonies like Lajpat Nagar housed “divergent classes”; the Gadgil Assurance Scheme pertained to those who had set up “jhuggies, khokhas, industrial sheds and all manners of temporary residential structures.”

Creation of Bangladesh

Not unlike the Partition-inspired debates in Court, about which documents really proved eligibility, the conundrum involving Bangladeshi residents revolved both in media reports and in government circles around what documents clinched claims of citizenship and whether it was advisable to link citizenship assertions to documents at all. At the same time, though there have been many eviction drives of suspected Bangladeshi residents in Delhi, there seems to have been no official consensus to deny ration cards or voter I-cards to the poor Bangladeshi migrant. But more importantly, even if there was such a consensus to deny ration cards, the documentary regime of rationing was not structured in a way to automatically exclude Bangladeshi residents or residents of another nationality, as this chapter will illustrate.

The state of Bangladesh was formed in the wake of the war with Pakistan fought amidst great international visibility largely to stem the free flow in its eastern territory of what one scholar terms “political refugees” into the various border states of West Bengal,

\[25\] Committee on Petitions, Thirteenth Lok Sabha: Thirty Third Report, (Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi), Presented to Lok Sabha on 22.8.2003, Chapter III.

\[26\] Ravinder Kaur, “The different layers can be observed when one moves from one small sub-division within one area to another”, op.cit, 111

\[27\] Committee on Petitions, op.cit.

\[28\] Weiner sustains a distinction between unwanted migrants, rejected peoples and political refugees. The last were a class of refugees, one deduces, to be those who fled political persecution from repressive
Tripura and Assam. Decades after it was formed, Bangladesh continued to share a very porous boundary with India though there were attempts made in crucial moments of “border-making” and sovereign discourse, to strengthen it. Refugee flows from Bangladesh to India continued unabated years after the formation of the latter; they were variously inspired – by riverbank erosion and related ecological crises, political persecution and kinship ties. These have been examined in detail elsewhere and are tangential to this dissertation. This chapter looks at Bangladeshi migrants in Delhi though it does not make any claims about the causes inspiring people to cross border, be it environmental degradation, political persecution at the time of the creation of the state or any other reason of forced migration that rendered them refugees. I use the term ‘migrant’ more often than ‘refugee’ or ‘immigrant’ because the persons discussed here are slum residents who did not enjoy political statuses which qualified them for protection under any refugee resettlement law nor were they accepted as those who had immigrated to India for legitimate reasons or through legal means via passports.

Narratives of ethnic tensions and local-refugee fallouts in India refer to the creation of Bangladesh as somehow signalling the breakdown of regional solidarity and triggering intense conflicts over state resources in Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya and West Bengal. This chapter is not intrinsically interested in the year 1971 but in how this moment of the creation of Bangladesh was constituted by citizenship and welfare discourse and electoral populism in India. What are immediately relevant are therefore not events that happened during the year but those which occurred much later though they were cast organically in the mould of the events of 1971. It is significant that various communal discourses surrounding Bangladeshi migrants and urban processes arranged themselves around regimes in the countries they were nationals of, and migrated to neighbouring countries the persecuting country shared a border with. Myron Weiner, “Rejected Peoples and Unwanted Migrants in South Asia”, Economic and Political Weekly, 28, no. 34 (1993): 1737.


Delhi is an exception in this regard – the various eviction drives were not a result of showdowns between migrants and locals, but the result of shrill nationalist rhetoric and votebank politics.
documentary practices. In a vitiated atmosphere of assertions and counter-assertions of citizenship, certain questions need to be posed. How did documentary practices of ration card and Voter I-card complicate the various assertions surrounding migrants or assumed migrants in urban poor localities? And how did this in turn affect enumeration drives entailing entitlements to the urban poor in general? Nationalist assertions of the interloper amidst the citizen population went round and round especially when they were made in the site of documentary claims. Was a Bangladeshi migrant to be penalized because he had acquired cards meant for citizens or did a Bangladeshi migrant qualify as a citizen because he possessed them and had therefore acquired a right against forcible deportation? Even if he did not possess any document establishing residence/citizenship in India, how could this in itself show him to be a cross-border migrant?

A common yet very affecting spectacle over the decades after the formation of Bangladesh staged by various parties of the Indian state like the Border Security Forces, the state government in question and the Home Ministry at the Centre was the forcible expulsion of Bangladeshi migrants across the border between the two countries. One of the states which sent selectively identified Bangladeshi slum residents following sporadic eviction drives was Delhi.

In such a scenario, where rationing documents could not be denied altogether to these persons – where they could not be denied given the nature of the screening process and at the same time not accepted as clinching citizenship – evictions had no basis in legal discourse. In Delhi, the Bangladeshi migrant question was a pressing and momentous one in marginal spaces such as bastis and jhuggi clusters and rarely with regard to affluent or even middle-class neighbourhoods. Nor was the question “how did this rich businessman or that industrialist from Bangladesh acquire a ration card” pertinent so much in Delhi. Let me now present a few illustrations of these complex negotiations around ‘residence’ and the category of Bangladeshi residents in the site of documentary practice.

At least three of the 6 retired officials interviewed conveyed a deep sense of unease over the mandate to identify and exclude Bangladeshi slum residents. This unease was not merely personal, it was inescapably linked to the structure of the application
process for ration cards where very few documents were required as proof rendering it impossible to determine nationality based on these documents alone. Documents demanded for issuing a ration card were a No-objection certificate from the landlord to verify residence or ownership proof in the form of a copy of the sale deed and/or previous ration card held by applicant and/or surrender certificate showing that he had surrendered his previous ration card. A passport copy was not mandatory. Between 1960 and 1980 at least, photo proof was not compulsory and if the applicant could not prove residence in Delhi (if he had lost his previous ration card) there was a provision enabling the applicant to produce an affidavit stating that he or she had either lost his card or possessed no card previous to this. “This last provision was made”, Jadeja, a food official said, “because of disputes between the tenant and the landlord/proprietor where the landlord would refuse to give the tenant proof of residence owing to financial disputes between the two”. Even though there were lists such as the Voter’s List or the Squatters’ Census which were records that could establish the authenticity of a slum resident’s application for ration card, Jadeja remarked that Inspectors and FSOs were not given any instructions to issue cards or evaluate applications based on this list. If the applicant was living somewhere and had a kitchen running, then he or she was eligible for a ration card. It would then appear that there was no stringent documentary rule that identified a resident by his nationality or intrinsically prevented a person of another nationality from applying for a ration card.

Food officials like Jadeja encountered an intense dilemma over the question of issuing ration cards to slum residents who had purportedly migrated to Delhi from Bangladesh. Jadeja furnished one such instance of this conundrum,

There was a shamshan ghat (cremation ground) on Lodhi road. Near this place, there was a cluster of nearly 200 jhuggis. This was in the early 80s, I remember. I was told that there were a lot of Bangladeshi residents staying in this jhuggi cluster and it was my task to issue ration cards to persons staying here. In this connection, two MLAs approached me and remained in contact with me, Arif Husain who represented Nizamabad constituency and Aarti Sagar who represented Jangpura constituency. Husain was obviously a Muslim and a member of the Congress party. Aarti Sagar would pressure me not to issue ration cards to these jhuggi residents on the grounds that “they were Muslim and that they were Bangladeshis and not Indian”. Husain told
me that he would accuse me publicly of communal prejudice if I did not issue cards to these jhuggi residents just because they were Muslim. “My dilemma was to determine if they were Bengali-speaking Indians or Bangladeshis”. I honestly didn’t know what to do. I passed the file to the Commissioner of Food and Civil Supplies, asking him to give me a yardstick. But I never got any clear order. “How do I prove this or that person is not an Indian national? Mathe pe to nahin likha hoga?” (It’s not written on your forehead, no?) I couldn’t be sure they were Bangladeshis and therefore I couldn’t discriminate against them.”

Jadeja indicated that he issued ration cards to the slum residents in the cluster. He added with a chuckle, “I tried to placate both MLAs however. Donon ko chai pilaya aur biscuits khilaya (I offered tea and biscuits to both of them) and I saved my job”. Interestingly, all the officials who spoke of this intense dilemma that Food Inspectors faced in identifying Bangladeshi applicants framed it as one that was relevant only in squatter settlements or slum colonies, indicating that there was no onus on food officials to be scrupulous in issuing cards to affluent or middle class subjects. Officials like Jadeja and Mehta decried the establishment for setting down no parameters, laying down no documentary checks and still expecting food officials to issue cards to only persons of Indian nationality. Madanlal Mehta uncannily, used the very same words that Jadeja used, “Surely, it is not written on their face that he or she is Bengali or Bangladesh?” He said bitterly, “No circulars are issued about documents to be submitted. Anyway, even if there are such requirements, how can JJ wallahs be expected to possess them?”

Jadeja and all other officials remarked that many politicians had chameleon-like colours, “Come elections, they say give ration card to these migrants. And after elections, they would say you (the Inspector) are encouraging encroachment and illegal occupation”. Some localities (like Shahdara and Seelampur) were singled out for hunting out Bangladeshi migrants, said Deepak Gupta, another food official. And in such localities, the various parties were divided over what stance to take, owing to the pulls and pressures of votebank politics, he added. The eviction drives that took place in 1992-1993 of selective Bangladeshi residents in Delhi rode on the back of highly politicized definitions of citizenship and its basis in documentary practice.
The evictions in Delhi and the framing in this region of the Bangladeshi migrant as “illegal alien” or the “infiltrator” occurred owing to a constellation of political developments such as a “saffron surge”, the Congress government’s “soft sensibility towards the forces of Hindu chauvinism” and votebank politics in the slum colonies of Delhi. The Narasimha Rao government initiated an eviction drive – a move that has been theorized in the context of fierce votebank politics in slum colonies – where earlier, the Congress could rely on the sturdy support of slum residents, this trend reversed in the early 1990s causing the Congress leaders in Delhi to feel no obligation to extend their patronage to residents there, especially “undocumented Muslim Bangladeshis”.

Scholars and government sources when they use the term “undocumented” do not mean that these migrants lack any kind of documents but mainly passports or documents proving Indian nationality. Though a lot of these migrants were extended government patronage and equal treatment (on par with local residents in slums) and issued ration cards, Voter I-cards and most importantly, tokens for their jhuggis (see next chapter for their significance), they were capriciously disowned by governments and termed aliens and infiltrators as they lacked passports. The Action Plan drawn up by the New Delhi administration in 1992 involved “the detection, identification and finally deportation” of these migrants from the capital city. But even before this Action Plan was prepared, there were attempts to exclude these migrants legally when the Election Commission gave a nation-wide directive to disenfranchise them. Here the idea was to both revise and “clean” existing voters’ lists and to prevent the enrolment of foreign nationals with instructions to

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32 Ibid, p.639. In the assembly elections of 1993, the Congress fared badly in these slum settlements causing them to nurse feelings of resentment and vengefulness against slum residents, indicates Ramachandran.
34 Sujata Ramachandran, 639
35 Ibid, 639
scour these areas for alien elements. Simultaneously, the home ministry insisted that documents like ration cards or registration in electoral rolls did not constitute citizenship even if they could be taken in to consideration. There was a “persistent ambiguity” around citizenship status which was always broken down to mean possession or non-possession of this or that document in the case of the Bangladeshi resident. A lack of documents often simply illustrated a violation of legal norms of residence on the part of the suspected Bangladeshi resident.

Until the early 1990s, there was no enumeration drive to give identification tokens or fixed documents (other than the ration card) to marginal subjects in Delhi. There was little done to enumerate poor Indians who by and far lacked birth certificates and passports, argue many scholars. An enumerative failure however did not prevent authorities from enacting official violence as the mass evictions of Bangladeshi residents in Delhi depict. When suspected migrants did get hold of documents like ration cards, they were gauged politically in terms of the votes they conjured. If at times protecting the Bangladeshi migrant’s ration card was promising for a party’s political prospects, at other times it threatened to compromise a party, as the Congress party example in the case of the 1992 Bangladeshi evictions show. Ambiguities in legal norms of residence, by and far, were kind to migrant squatter families who benefited from the Food Inspector’s confusion as the recorded statements by Jadeja and Mehta show.

The Emergency

The norms of stable residence, so central to refugee rehabilitation drives and Bangladeshi enumeration narratives, were insidiously present in Emergency measures. This was because these norms governed and were governed by the twin initiatives to clean the city of the residual poor and control the growth of the urban population. No scholar has compiled and analyzed the intense claims over housing during the Emergency and in their wake explored the faultlines between official inscription of eligibility and the illegibility of official inscription better than Emma Tarlo. The work of Tarlo described documents as carrying the most insidious, fragile and compromised

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36Ibid, 640.
protections – where subaltern persons had to undergo painful bodily interventions or ‘motivate’ others to acquire sterilization certificates, where the urban poor had to constantly enter negotiations with, speak the language of the state and engage in the market of sterilization certificates to be able to make claims on the state.

Another scholar conjures various scenarios based on field reports where a coercive logic of legality was injected into everyday life through the intrinsically illegal drive of Emergency sterilizations – where ticketless passengers were subjected to vasectomies and exempted from fines or heavily penalized when they did not agree, where children could be admitted in schools only if their parents were sterilized, where labourers could find themselves unemployed for as long as they were unable to produce a sterilization certificate to their contractor and where a cardholder presenting his ration card at a Fair Price Shop for food supplies could be turned away if his card showed him to have 6 sons, unless he were able to procure a sterilization certificate even if those children were only fictitious to enable the cardholder to receive extra rations.37 The authorities in all these cases, the ticket inspector, the teacher, the contractor and the FPS dealer were roped into the campaign, or blindfolded into reporting transgressors because they were made responsible for fulfilling quotas of sterilization, another expression infusing the drive with the magic of state legality38.

If these narratives interrogate the instrumentality of documents (mainly sterilization certificates) to coercive family planning measures during the Emergency, this chapter would like to study another set of documents (census documents) in order to discursively analyze food and housing policy. Census documents give us close insights into the construction of subaltern classes through enumerative practice undertaken during this period. The census documents in question are part of a Special study of “houseless persons” that include (a) a questionnaire that the census enumerators used to interview houseless persons in Delhi during the Emergency and (b) a case study of

38Veena Das suggests that we see the state as “a form of regulation that oscillates between a rational mode and a magical mode of being”. Veena Das, “Signature of the State: The Paradox of Illegibility” in Anthropology in the margins of the state, eds. Veena Das and Deborah Poole, (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004), 225.
houseless persons based on the questionnaire. Many of the questions asked in this *Special study* give us clues to understanding different state policies, both the enduring ones like food distribution and the impermanent ones like sterilization, housing, etc. The questionnaire includes questions that evaluate, very directly, the impact of certain state policies on homeless persons. While the census study of homeless persons was undertaken during 1971 along with the general census, a special case study based on a questionnaire prepared for homeless persons, though included in the 1971 publication, was undertaken in the shadow of the Emergency, either in the year 1976 or 1977. The enumerators ask the subjects they interview, “what do you feel about the present Emergency?” As such, many of the questions attempt to generate opinion about the Emergency initiatives targeted at the various urban poor and mainly the homeless.

A reading of the *Special study* of the “houseless in delhi” tells us that the enumerators were eager to establish that the subjects they interviewed, though random, were from disparate backgrounds, demographically speaking – men and women of different ages, from different parts of the country, rendered houseless by various reasons. The homeless subjects interviewed came from different locations in quest of different things in the city. This questionnaire would have demanded lengthy conversations between the enumerator and the subject – if the former’s questions were classified into subsets to qualify the houseless and discriminate between them on the basis of circumstances,

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39“Census of India 1971: Houseless in Delhi”, *Special study*, (Delhi: Director of Census Operations, 1977), 40. This census was broken down into three parts, the findings of the 1971 census, survey of night shelters and case studies of houseless persons. The case studies were transcribed on the basis of a survey questionnaire of the “houseless in delhi” during the Emergency.

40Indeed, one of the subjects interviewed was from UP, another from Tamil Nadu, yet another from Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, etc; the men and women interviewed were from different age groups – one of them described himself as old and unable to learn anything new, another was a strapping young lad who had taken a fancy to the daughter of a shoe-shine boy nearby. Houseless persons were recorded to be differently engaged in this case study where shoe-shine boys, rickshaw pullers, garbage pickers, beggars all feature. The various predicaments of houseless persons are also vividly described - a woman describes her homelessness as a consequence of the Partition violence, another man ascribes it to his stepmother’s violence, etc. The enumerators also attempt to present a diverse profile of the houseless and their earnings and their expenditure. Different reasons are attributed to their unemployed status and their refusal to put up in *ren baseras* (like a belief that they are for the desperately poor, that they are ridden with infection or lack of knowledge of these places) or to get rented accommodations in the city. Consequently, pavements, footpaths, parks, thresholds of houses, temples are all described to be “the abode” of homeless persons. The study also records some of them to have once stayed in small but fixed settlements but as having had to abandon them owing to one reason or another.
assets, employment, state of health, conditions of living and shelter sought, answers to these questions would have warranted more than Yes/No responses. This census of houseless persons also incorporates a descriptive case study of homeless persons based on this elaborate questionnaire. Even as enumerators ask subjects discriminating questions, classifying them into various subsets based on their predisposition and their ambitions (whether they would like a house or not); their conditions (like those forced to beg and those who willed themselves to do so); their riches (inventory of household goods), their understanding of hygiene (where they defecate), their exposure to disease (questions pertaining to their medical condition), their morality (whether they were prone to venereal disease or not), their levels of education (whether they read books, whether they write letters)\(^41\) the questionnaire when read in conjunction with the case study constructs homeless persons in a certain way.

This chapter would like to make a couple of preliminary observations about the *Special study* of the “houseless in delhi” (both the questionnaire and the case study). While some of the questions asked in this *Special study* of houseless persons in Delhi were similar to the ones asked in a general census\(^42\), the former could never be mistaken for the latter owing to some of the idiomatic questions it asks about where the subject defecates\(^43\), whether the person begs, whether the person is afflicted with venereal disease, where he stays at day and at night or even what the person’s habits of leisure are.\(^44\) The last question was framed often in relation to how the homeless person spent his or her earnings – on bidis, cinema-going or gambling. One subject is quoted as saying, “I have

\(^{41}\)One of the subjects interviewed in the *Special study*, a man by the name of Chandan Chakravorty was recorded to speak good English and to have studied up to BA II and to have worked once in the Forest Department, 42.

\(^{42}\)Some of the questions in the general census of 1971 and the *Special study* of houseless persons that are comparable are name, caste, age, religion, languages spoken, place of birth, period of residence in Delhi, particulars of household members, even questions like place from where migrating which was asked for instance in the 1951 general census in the context of the Partition, occupation history, etc.

\(^{43}\)One of the subjects when asked this question, replies, that the railway chowkidars could be persuaded to let them use railway toilets, 42.

\(^{44}\)The subjects of this census study were constructed to be the idiomatic ‘Other’ through metaphor and narrative detail. For instance, the enumerator describes (as against records) a subject to be “huddled under a rag”, 35; “we could feel irritating smell of country liquor coming from the persons collected around us”, 38; “joined a band of hippies”, 39. A question asked to an ‘educated’ homeless person is framed thus, “you are young, smart and handsome, why don’t you get married?”, 2. The narrative detail may be found in a description such as this, “he is of medium height, slim, wears a bell-bottom and shirt and muffler on his forehead”, 38.
many addictions like *charas*, card-playing and films. I cannot imagine life without *charas* and take it daily without fail. Films and cards are next to it. Recently, I have seen ‘Sholay’ and I was thrilled by it’. Finally, the questions about family planning and whether the subject underwent any such intervention or undertook any measure was not part of any other general census before 1981.

The questionnaire when read along with the case study produces at times a narrative of naiveté, vulnerability, the lack of enterprise and ignorance, at times, the criminal instincts and mendaciousness of these persons, and at other times, a narrative of the coerciveness of state power. This dual or triple narrative is made possible by the ambivalent role of the enumerating official who at times saw himself as a representative of benign authority and at other times felt compelled to condemn, though in veiled fashion, the violent manifestations of state power and tempted to comment on the difficulty of enumeration in a vitiated atmosphere. This chapter will illustrate these various roles that enumerating officials straddled in the context of this Special study of the ‘“houseless in delhi”’.

The case study collapses measures embodying care for and power over the homeless resident. It speaks of the forcible removal of “pavement dwellers” in the same breath as the setting up of shelters for the homeless during the Emergency, “Special arrangements had been made to remove the homeless persons sleeping on open corridors and foot-paths. This drive was undertaken with the police assistance wherever required. Publicity was given among the houseless people for use of night shelters. Slum department claim that due to these special efforts not even a single death was reported during 1975-76 otherwise on account of exposure to cold every year few deaths were reported.” Routine evictions of the homeless at various places in this official narrative were glossed over by the construction of *ren baseras*, the publicity surrounding them, the propaganda about the Emergency effort for the homeless poor. Such propaganda consisted of constructing the Emergency housing for

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45The case study gives examples of homeless persons who paint wounds on themselves to appear to be disabled beggars, who travel without tickets on trains, etc.
46Ibid, 83.
the homeless as an unprecedented measure. In interviewing a woman sleeping on the pavement, the enumerator comments that “many like her could be seen occupying the stairs of Jama Masjid before the declaration of emergency” as if to suggest that such sights were an aberration during the Emergency. The case study interviews often generates affirmation of the Emergency ironically by the few homeless persons who had somehow escaped the gaze of the Slum Department officials and evaded capture to the ren-baseras. While recording answers to the repeated question, what do you think of the present Emergency, enumerators made sure that these responses never took the form of unqualified criticism. Take this conversation, for instance,

“See, our municipal corporation had established at least four ren-baseras around this area. Why don’t you sleep in any of them during the winter?”
“There are reasons for not sleeping in a ren-basera. Even among houseless persons, those who are in the lowest rung of the ladder such as the beggars and the disabled sleep in ren-baseras. They emit an obnoxious odour and sometimes, lice crawl on their bodies. This is most irritating.”
“Where do you keep your goods?”
“Every morning we deposit our belongings after packing them in one bundle in a nearby warehouse. The charge is 20 paise.”
“What do you feel about the current Emergency?”
“This state of Emergency is likely to bring in numerous fruitful results. It is like a light in the midst of despair, a smile that may dispel many tears, although it has brought us many inconveniences in its wake. The police come in jeeps at night, armed with batons. Those who cannot run, mostly women and children, old and sick, suffer much. But yet I feel that it is a temporary phase and the day is not far when we would also find livelihood and shelter like other citizens.”

The abrupt violence of the forcible removal of these persons of which the interviewed subject provides testimony through the use of words like police, “armed with batons” is lost in the enumerator’s framing of the conversation where the Emergency illuminates the lives of homeless persons with a smile. At other times, however, the enumerator appears uncomfortable with the government which through its mandate of clean streets purged of beggars and other riff-raff, had filled the homeless person with a sense of foreboding and compounded his vulnerability and in addition, had made his (the enumerator’s) task difficult.

47Special study, “Houseless in Delhi”, 40-41.
It was early January and the first slight drizzle of the winter season was coming down. We spotted a frustrated young man of 18 in the Gandhi ground area. He was huddled under a rag with his head resting on the knees.

“Are you awake?” we asked.

“How can I sleep in this cold with an aching head and a feverish body? What are you looking for at the dead of night?”

After a small pause, he muttered in a choking voice, “The police have just ransacked me.” We attempted to remove the fear of police from his mind and explained to him the purpose of our visit. We offered him a cigarette. He said, “If there is anyone in this world I fear, it is the policeman. He treats us with iron hands.”

There was a widespread feeling in the area that as part of a cleanliness drive, all the houseless persons would be forced to shift from this place. This had infused a feeling of insecurity and helplessness among all the shelterless persons, making them all the more cautious while talking to strangers.

The ration card seems to have been marginal to the resettlement drives of homeless persons even though some of them may have possessed them. It is significant that the Emergency which saw excessive legislation did not introduce any Control Orders of Rationing – the significant Control Orders containing, among other things, provisions for ration cards for homeless persons were introduced either before (1965 Delhi Rationing Regulations, 1968 Delhi Specified Food Articles (Regulation of Distribution) Order) or after the Emergency (1981 Delhi Specified Food Articles (Regulation of Distribution) Order). The census questionnaire, conspicuously does not ask the homeless person if he possessed a ration card or how long the homeless person possessed a ration card. A speculative answer to the question why they were not asked this question may have been that these cards were issued very irregularly to homeless persons who had to apply for them from time to time and that too for temporary periods. It was highly unlikely that ration cards were issued in bulk to ren-baseras which they could have used to claim rations or housing mainly because these night shelters were just that – shelters for the night and most of them were seasonal. If they were issued at all in ren-baseras, ration cards would have been, issued, in all likelihood to homeless persons in their individual capacity because the ren-basera could not have qualified as a fixed residence housing families of homeless persons.

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48Ibid, 35.
49One of the enumerators does ask a subject in the case study, “Do you cook yourself?” to which the woman interviewed responds, “Never, I have no utensils”, 37.
Women were not allowed to stay in these *ren-baseras* even if their husbands stayed there for the night and no separate night shelters were started for women as the conversation of the enumerator with a female subject reveals.50

Under the beggary laws in force in Delhi, recidivists or repeat offenders were liable to ten years while first time offenders could be put in jail for a period ranging from one to three years.51 The Social Welfare Department’s registers recording the various beggars who were apprehended under different names were in the process of being converted digitally.52 This record consisted of biometric information or the fingerprints of beggars and their photographs apart from their name, date of birth and place of birth.53 But many of those evicted under the Delhi Begging Rules or the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act over the years were not even beggars as newspaper reports show.54 Often their capture was contingent on the Social Welfare Department official’s perception of what beggars look like as the Director of the Beggars Court at Sewa Kutir admits to the journalist Aman Sethi in his book, *A Free Man*.55 The evictions of homeless persons unlike those undertaken by MCD officials during the Emergency of slum residents post demolitions as described by Emma Tarlo were not accompanied by paperwork – no demolition slips or allotment letters were issued to any of these persons as they possessed no assets for which they deserved compensation. Unlike the Partition-displaced refugees, even their ration cards, if these persons possessed any, must have been worthless at the time of eviction. In the 1965 and the 1968 Rationing Orders and various subsequent Rationing Orders issued in Delhi, ration cards for the homeless were issued for a temporary period of time,

50“Enquiring from the *ren basera* authorities, we found that for certain valid reasons, women were not allowed in the existing *ren baseras* and there were no separate night shelters for them”, writes the enumerator, ibid, 38.
51Aman Sethi, *A Free Man*, Noida: Random House, 201; ibid, 120.
52Ibid, 120.
53Ibid, 120-121
54Aman Sethi records, for instance, one snake charmer to have been falsely implicated under the beggary law in Delhi, ibid, 123.
55These perceptions consisted of what a beggar’s palm looked like in comparison to that of a worker or a rickshaw puller. The Director of the Beggars’ Court informs Aman Sethi that the calluses forming little ridges on the palm caused by the hard plastic handles of the rickshaw in the case of the rickshaw puller and the scuffed nails which were the result of handling bricks and sand in the case of the mazdoor set these people apart from the beggar who may be identified by his callus-free palms and the untarnished nails. Ibid, 118.
renewed rarely after the applicant had fulfilled elaborate application procedures. The 1968 Delhi Specified Food Articles (Regulation of Distribution) Order states that a homeless person may be issued a household food card stamped “houseless” which will be valid for a period not exceeding 12 weeks while the 1981 Order allows the homeless person to apply for a household card which was valid for 6 months.56

It is perhaps hardly surprising that homeless persons were issued temporary and limited rations. What is remarkable, however, is the emphasis that enforcing officials place on the importance of the kitchen in the definition of “home” while denying permanent rations to the homeless person. One of the contentions behind offering limited rations or none at all to the homeless was that they lacked a kitchen, firewood or cooking utensils – what the homeless found to be a woeful inadequacy of the government scheme of rationing which offered kerosene but no firewood or cooking utensils becomes a pretext for denying rations. Assistant Commissioner in the Department of Food and Supplies, Delhi at the time of this interview, Tyagi fulminated, “What is the point of giving a beggar rations? Beggars are homeless and most often, the homeless are beggars. Bartan kahan rakhenge aur atta kahan rakhenge? Unko ration cards de ke bhi kya faida?” (Where will they keep their utensils, where will they keep their flour? What is the use of giving ration cards to people like that?) This food official thought cooked meals for such persons were a better idea and that any ration card issued to a beggar or any other homeless person was a document wasted. Official after official shared this idea that ration cards made sense only if the person in question possessed a kitchen or at least a stove. A conceptual distinction was then sustained between a person who lacked a home and one who lived in a makeshift home like a thatched hut or what would be termed jhuggi-jhompris in Delhi who most often had a stove even though the kitchen defined in a pure sense may be absent. A homeless person while he was defined in a Rationing Regulations as “a person who has no fixed or identifiable place of

567 (2), Delhi Specified Food Articles (Regulation of Distribution) Order, 1968, op.cit; 11 (2), Delhi Specified Food Articles (Regulation of Distribution) Order, 1981. I place emphasis on the term ‘household’ because rationing authorities on the one hand did not discount the existence of families of homeless persons but on the other, regarded these families as unstable as they were not centred around a stable home with a hearth.
dwelling\textsuperscript{57}, for purposes of rationing, rationing officials told me, was simply a person who did not have stable cooking arrangements.

A similar logic was at work when rations were issued to the Partition ‘refugee’ as well. The makeshift tents, the stoves and the firewood in these tents were considered good enough for temporary ration cards but not permanent ration cards. In 1990, permanent ration cards were issued to families of what-were-deemed illegal \textit{jhuggi} residences as part of a populist drive by the V.P.Singh government to embrace the slum resident into the welfare fold. The same drive however did not issue ration cards to families residing in shanties on pavements and road berms. The V.P.Singh enumeration initiative (see next chapter) included an injunction against the issue of ration cards to those inhabiting settlements in open spaces such as pavements, streets or what were termed “road berms”.\textsuperscript{58} This comparison only illuminates the highly contingent forms of welfare practice in fluctuating political settings. But more importantly, these various examples illustrate the document’s utility in policing mobility. The slum resident residing in a cluster or a colony could be considered for enumeration because his fragile residence was less flimsy than a shanty on the pavement. In considering various categories (slum resident, beggar/homeless person, refugee) postcolonial authorities were guided by notions of the ‘permanence’ of the document. Only a sedentary resident of a sturdy home deserved a “permanent” ration card, in the reckoning of rationing officials.

Another distinction sustained between the slum resident and the homeless person was the notion of family. Here again, different official documents treated the homeless person differently. While both census reports and food legislations use the terms ‘home’ and ‘house’ or ‘houseless’ and ‘homeless’ interchangeably, they understand the relationship between family and residence differently. Though (the 1968 and the 1981) Rationing Orders issued in Delhi post independence specified that ration cards for the homeless should be family cards rather than individual cards (cards issued to individuals), they did

\footnote{Both the Delhi Rationing Regulations, 1965 and the Delhi Specified Articles (Regulation of Distribution) Order, 1981 offer the same definition of a homeless person.}

\footnote{“Ration cards issued to jhuggi dwellers”, \textit{The Hindustan Times}, New Delhi, March 28, 1990. A berm is defined as an area of ground at the side of a road. \textit{Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary}, 2005.}
not put these temporary cards on par with household cards that were issued to heads of stable families organised around a fixed residence. The documentary regime of rationing saw the concepts of family and residence as entwined with each other in this crucial administrative sense. The household consumer card must include only members of the family related to each other all of whom must share a kitchen. Anybody not related to the family cannot be included in the card and a member of the family who has migrated somewhere cannot be part of the card either. Ties of kinship and familial togetherness have no place in the scheme of the ration card which recognizes only the impersonal construct of household. A visiting member of the family cannot be allowed to draw rations on the household ration card. The census documents on the other hand take a different approach, painstakingly recording various composite elements of the family even of the homeless person – the questionnaire includes questions pertaining to the head and various dependents; the religion, caste, income of the family. Very importantly, the questionnaire asks “Have you close relations like husband, wife, father, mother, son, unmarried daughter, brother, staying separately from you? If yes, give particulars” and proceeds to ask for their name, age, how related, address, occupation, whether he remits money to the houseless person and whether the houseless person remits money to him/her/them. Other questions that the census enumerator asks, binding the homeless person conceptually with his family even if he lacked a residence pertain to the health of the family members. Question No. 24 in the questionnaire asks the homeless person whether there was “a disease in the household during the year”, name of the household members fallen sick. The census enumerators then treated the family as a concept turning on ties of blood rather than common residence organised around a hearth as the rationing authorities do. Though they use the term ‘household’ rather than ‘family’, census authorities acknowledged homeless persons and their families to be bound by affective-biological ties even when they were away from each other recognizing the possibility that even homeless persons may wish to take care of each other when ill, provide money in times of need. Another question that presumed ties of kinship of

59Question 16
60Question 24; It also asks the homeless persons the following questions about family members who have fallen ill, name of illness, month of illness and number of days, place where stayed during illness, who treated and when.
homeless persons to family residing in a settled establishment or home was whether they received letters from their native place (suggesting family), do you receive and write letters to your native house and since when he had not visited his native house.61

If this conveys the impression that family enumeration of homeless persons during the Emergency was benign or lacking in agenda or grave implications, the last few questions in the questionnaire dispel such ideas almost immediately. Questions 25 (a), (b), (c) ask in a deceptively bland, subtle and unsinister tone, would you like to have any more children? Have you adopted any family planning programme? According to you, how many children a person should have? A couple of things contribute to the unsinister quality of these questions. The idiom employed here is family planning, rendering it a voluntary affair, and not sterilization – a crude and coarse word that immediately conjured images of coercion and brutality.62 From the various testimonies of homeless persons, it would appear that police officials and other Emergency authorities may have presented those enumerated in the census, the option of getting sterilized or facing removal either to a ren basera or to some place out of city bounds.

Another question in the census questionnaire – Questions 22 (a) and 22 (b) – ask if the person was registered as a voter and if so, where and if he or she voted in the last Corporation/Metropolitan Council/Vidhan Sabha/Lok Sabha election? The census authorities did not presume them to be non-citizens in this basic legal sense so that the mere fact of lacking a residence did not render them ineligible to possess Voter I-Cards. But as the section on the evictions of Bangladeshi residents shows, possessing these cards did not translate into citizenship either63.

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61 See the various questions contained in Question 32. The numbering is somewhat off the mark here. The question whether the homeless person writes or receives letters implies another thing obviously, that the census authorities did not foreclose the fact of the homeless person’s literacy.
62 Questions 26 (a) and 26 (b) that are asked immediately after the questions on family planning are framed thus, “What do you expect your sons to be? What do you expect your daughters to be?” The quick succession of these questions frames them as part of an innocuous narrative of homeless persons, their understanding of a nuclear family and their prospects of a future for their children.
63 Whether, homeless persons did actually apply for and acquire such cards is a question this dissertation has no means of answering, as I did no field work in this area.
The phantasmic force of the document

In sizing up the passport as a document used by the Indian and Pakistani governments on both sides of the border, Vazira Zamindar makes use of the term “phantasm”\(^{64}\). She implies, by this term, that both governments assigned nationalities and disciplined movement on the basis of an apparition-like document. The passport fixed identity in a spectral manner in strange scenarios where a Hindu or a Muslim subject “threw away his passport, concealed his passport, or” had “not yet acquired one”\(^{65}\). Zamindar’s insights explaining how the document takes on a certain life, rendering shifts from one identity to another\(^{66}\) are extremely useful to this chapter. When a document tends to affirm identity and at the same time, to question it, to extend assurances and yet to dilute them, it may be deemed to be operating as phantasm.

The various moments of the enumeration of the subaltern subject (Partition, the creation of Bangladesh and the Emergency) exemplify the phantasmic force of the document. The identification document rendered the subject eligible for rehabilitation. But, in doing so, it threatened to dilute her claims and compromise her chances of procuring meaningful government welfare concessions. Everywhere, the document, whether it was the ration card, the beggar’s certificate or the census questionnaire revealed its phantasmic properties dangling assurances only to weaken them, obscure them or replace them with dire consequences. Let me illustrate this point a little more.

One of the enumerative initiatives conspicuous by its absence in the post-independent rationing regime was the counting of the homeless. While the late colonial rationing authorities undertook such surveys in various provinces as a prelude to issuing ration cards, it appears post-independence that such enumerative exercises were left to the census authorities and non-governmental organizations like the *Bharat Sevak Samaj* in Delhi. The homeless, if they acquired ration cards at all, did so through application process, and not through the initiative of the government or the Food and Civil Supplies

\(^{64}\) Vazira Zamindar, 280-295. Zamindar sees the phantasmic qualities of the passport as corresponding both to its form and its functions.

\(^{65}\) Vazira Zamindar, 283.

\(^{66}\) In one instance, she illustrates this documentary shift to be one from Muslim, Muslim refugee, Muslim repatriate to Muslim national. Vazira Zamindar, 284.
Department in particular. And when they did apply, they were assured only of a provisional or a temporary ration. In comparison, the counting of the homeless was diligently carried out by census authorities. If the dissertation argued earlier that this exercise was symbolic of the power and the reach of the (colonial) enumerative machinery, this was equally so even in the instance of the postcolonial state where enumerators were despatched in the dark of the night, come every census, to the nooks and crannies of lanes, pavements, parks, temples and homeless shelters. Yet, time and again, such an exercise was belied by the inherently coercive functions of enumeration. Consider this instance of the 1961 census exercise of counting the homeless. To start with, census enumerators did not use their imagination to visit places that the homeless may have adopted for the night or a period – they fell back on the lists of places of the houseless prepared by the Bharat Sewak Samaj and the Superintendent of Police of North, Central and South districts. Special enumerators were appointed for these areas with instructions to count the homeless in areas assigned to them on the night between 28th February and 1st March 1961. On the same night census authorities set out along with police officials laden with the lists to identify the homeless of Delhi. Yet this symbolic power of the postcolonial state contained in its enumerative apparatus to count even those sleeping in parks and corridors disintegrated in the face of its own policies to regulate the homeless. Around the same time that the census enumerators were engaged in counting the homeless, there was an Act termed the Delhi Prevention of Begging Rules, 1960 passed to keep the beggars off the road. Modelled after the Bombay Anti-Beggary Act, the beggar’s permit within the Act sought to limit the number of beggars in the streets of Delhi through a discursive move by which begging was rendered an ‘entitlement’ that had to be sought through an application (form). The beggar was to carry the permit with him wherever he went “while soliciting or receiving money, food or gifts and shall, on demand by a police officer, produce it for inspection”.  

The 1961 census was faulted with not covering a good number of the homeless population in Delhi. In explaining the “under-enumeration” of the homeless in the 1961

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68 Ibid, 3 (3)
census, enumerating authorities record their excuse thus, “The Bombay Anti-Beggary Act\textsuperscript{69} was applied to Delhi with effect from 1\textsuperscript{st} March 1961, the very night on which the census enumeration of the houseless people took place. When the enumerators along with the police made their appearance to enumerate houseless persons, consisting mostly of beggars, the latter suspecting that the police had come to round them up, fled away and hid themselves at places where they could not be located. That accounts for some degree of under-enumeration of this class of population.”\textsuperscript{70} This astonishing narrative exemplified the “enabling violation”\textsuperscript{71} embodied in the beggar’s certificate, which enabled some to beg while rendering all eligible for persecution.

**Conclusions: Negotiating the documentary norms of family and residence**

The experiences of the various classes of the ‘subaltern’ like refugees, houseless persons and slum residents spill into each other and are yet dissimilar. Conceptually, these categories may be untenable or at best, very contingent on administrative description – the refugee was houseless at some point before and when he or she claimed state protection in a refugee camp; a refugee like the Bangladeshi migrant may choose to reside in a slum; a slum resident may suddenly find himself without a house. The claims that these various classes make through their documents may be equally fragile. All these classes of persons, the houseless, the refugee and the slum resident face the intense dilemma of seeking enumeration in the hope of some entitlement but fearing that a card or a document may tighten the noose around his or her neck. They are, in a sense held fugitive by the phantasmatic document where every such person stands the risk of incriminating himself by applying for a document. Beggars could either be counted in the census and risk police detection or stay away and remain unenumerated. The Bangladeshi migrant could apply for a ration card and enjoy rations but he did so at the risk of local furore and in fear of political persecution. A slum resident could be falsely identified to be a Bangladeshi migrant and have his ration card

\textsuperscript{69} The Delhi Rules were simply an extension of the powers conferred by Section 35 of the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959. The Bombay Anti-Beggary Act which the census authorities mention actually alludes to the latter.


\textsuperscript{71} Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Righting Wrongs”, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, no.2/3 (2004): 524.
and Voter I-Card cancelled and find himself deported to Bangladesh. In this sense, the various moments of state intervention that this chapter dwells on – the Partition, the 1971 War and rehabilitation of refugees and the Emergency impinged on all these classes. The Partition-displaced person residing in a jhuggi and occupying government land was identified and his claims scrutinized at times in his capacity as refugee (when his refugee certificate was scrutinized) and at other times as a slum resident (when his ration card showing residence proof in the jhuggi was demanded). The eviction of the Bangladeshi migrant who resided in a slum settlement and falsely procured a ration card was hinged on a magical legality as there were no satisfactory rules prescribing norms of eligibility and even existing norms were diluted in slum areas.72 (see following chapter for more evidence on this point)

There are many inferences to draw from these conceptual ambiguities and administrative discrepancies. The documentary locus of citizenship in India defined both in the juridical and substantive sense was constantly shifting. If certain subjects could not make a juridical claim of citizenship and assert their right to stay in the country on the basis of ration cards and Voter I-cards (Bangladeshi migrants), it was not enough for other subjects to invoke their nationality and submit documentary proof of the same to enjoy legitimate housing (the refugee certificates of Partition-displaced persons in the Gadgil scheme). Yet others could not enjoy rations on par with household ration card holders simply because they were marked “houseless”.

If the category of residence inscribed the illegibility of entitlement, suspending the subaltern subject between “threat and guarantee”73 and if it reflected the shifting gaze of the state, the norm of family was not cast in uncomplicated terms either. The enumeration of families either in the census or in ration cards held out the promise of rations or some other entitlement but also ominously threatened the subject with assault on his body.74

72 The documentary regime of rationing was complicit in the disenfranchisement and the criminalization of Bangladeshi migrants having evolved no means of identifying nationality.
73 Deborah Poole, “Between Threat and Guarantee: Justice and Community in the Margins of the Peruvian State” in Anthropology in the Margins of the State, eds. Veena Das and Deborah Poole, (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004).
74 This is an expression used by David Arnold in his article on the bubonic plague outbreak in late 19th century colonial India. David Arnold, Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in
(emergency sterilizations based on census slips or ration cards). The subaltern subject was ensnared both by enumerative exercises that entwined residence with family and those which treated these categories as removed from each other. As a man or a woman with a residence and a family, the subaltern subject risked exposing his family to danger (the Bangladeshi migrant’s ration card enabled authorities to track down his or her family). When he was presumed or enumerated to be a subject without a fixed residence but with a family, he was only entitled to minimal rations and still an eligible candidate for sterilization. Many of these predicaments of subaltern subjects were a consequence of the phantasmatic force of the document. The document served a symbolic display of power and welfareism through the enumeration of homeless subjects but failed to enumerate them all. The enumerating official lived many of these contradictions as he was loath to be recognized as the dark face of authority that came “armed with batons” but keen to wear the face of government concern that inquired into the “problems of pavement dwellers”. The rationing official similarly expressed his deep discomfort with a discourse that discriminated between subjects on their nationality and their claims to citizenship on the basis of a documentary regime owing to the nebulous character of the very same regime. Documents placed officials in this strange space which they often used to redeem themselves, to flesh out ethical capacities and to fashion themselves. In this sense, documents pruned the different sensibilities of officials at any given point.

This chapter tries to substantiate the dissertation’s claim that documents defined the contours of welfare distribution and circumscribed its limits. The identification document created taxonomies of subaltern subjects laden with boundless implications. The next chapter considers one such taxonomy, namely, the communities of eligibility based on a rash of identification documents. The following chapter narrows the focus on documents and welfare to a slum cluster in South Delhi. Residents of this cluster suddenly found themselves classified into different administrative communities based on their duration of stay in Delhi as reflected in their ration cards and ‘VP Singh cards’.

The King’s “Gift”: Narratives of Enumeration in a Jhuggi Cluster

“We can mortgage our gold and silver but never our ration card.”

Gyanvanti, a resident of Govindpuri cluster.

On the first day of the New Year of 1990, V.P. Singh, the then-Prime Minister of India arrived in Navjeevan Camp\(^1\), a squatter settlement located on the margins of Govindpuri in South Delhi not more than 5 kilometres from the noisy industrial area of Okhla. On this day, V.P. Singh announced, to much applause, that every jhuggi resident in Delhi would be issued a ration card by the end of three months. This chapter explores the social life of a relatively obscure enumeration initiative bearing the authorship of a deeply progressive leader in the setting of a jhuggi cluster. Underlying the initiative were normatively derived notions of entitlement that sought to demolish historically sacrosanct administrative criteria of a stable home by issuing a document to those squatting on illegal land. In the days following V.P. Singh’s visit to the Govindpuri cluster, concepts of raw distributive (and redistributive) justice arranged themselves around documents where urban welfare claimants were classified into communities of eligibility based on the nature of the document they held. The 1990 enumeration initiative was hauntingly and complexly present in contemporary everyday constructions of just entitlement.

This chapter comprises narratives of residents and their documents against the backdrop of rationales of food distribution, conceptions of a house (all that it is, but more importantly, all that it is not) and norms of household identification in a jhuggi cluster in Govindpuri in South Delhi. This was the very first cluster that V.P. Singh visited to announce his initiative to provide a ration card to every slum settlement in Delhi. This chapter argues that V.P. Singh’s enumeration drive in conjunction with the

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\(^1\)Squatter settlements in Delhi are called camps and a group or collective of camps is called a cluster. A single house in a squatter settlement is in hindi termed a jhuggi or a jhopri. Jhuggis are “informal structures built with bamboo, thatch, old building materials or raw bricks for residential purposes by the poor”. Jhuggi clusters, as I shall refer to squatter clusters in this chapter, are so termed when they come up on public land meant for urban development. They have been recorded to have sprung up along railway tracks, on the banks of the river, near industrial areas, so on. Amitabh Kundu, Somnath Basu, “Words and concepts in urban development and planning: An analysis in the context of regional variation and changing policy perspectives, http://www.unesco.org/most/p2basu.htm as accessed on December 1, 2011.
Master Plan and narratives of public purpose shaped the contours of policies of entitlement, set the parameters for housing policy and re-ordered the city. Ration cards and identity cards were not confined to the field of public distribution alone, they extended tantalizing promises of housing entitlements or rehabilitation to jhuggi residents, promises which threatened to alter the urban landscape of Delhi. V.P.Singh's initiative ushered in a new era of urban poor discourse where datelines and identity cards were intimately tied to housing claims and food entitlements, perceptions of encroachers of government land and rationales of demolition drives. Through a case study of narratives of enumeration in a jhuggi cluster, this chapter highlights the intricate web of documents, entitlements and the city. The various identity documents spawned by the V.P.Singh administration allowed slum residents to playfully and poignantly inhabit authority\(^2\) and to simultaneously carry out a strong ethical appraisal of legal authority. But more significantly, the narratives of the slum residents amount to a rigorous critique of the relationship between the nature of the document and what constitutes a just entitlement. The 1990 initiative involved officials drawing crucial fault-lines between the enumerable space of the household and the affective space of the family. Both the V.P.Singh government and governments post-V.P.Singh carved out core concepts of eligibility and entitlement based on the tenuous documents issued during the 1990 initiative. The slum residents of this cluster challenged concepts of justice that were grounded in the legal categories of the document (what constitutes a household, for instance) and the law implicit in arbitrary administrative stipulations. The disparate narratives here, whether they involved tales of loss, theft or fabrication of ration cards and ID cards, all contained intense ethical formulations of justice. In all these instances of everyday encounters with the ID document, slum residents operated with coherent notions of justice and just entitlement. Ultimately, this chapter advances an argument that in such spaces as the cluster, the identification document enables residents to accumulate cultural capital critical to individual and collective struggles of survival and progress.

The scene unfolds

V.P. Singh’s visit to Navjeevan camp was a visit that very few of those present on the occasion could easily forget. As one resident of the camp recalls dramatically, Gali gali me shor mach raha tha ki Raja Saheb naya saal camp me manane wale hein. (In every street, the word spread that Raja Saheb was going to celebrate New Year in our camp). On account of being the adopted son of a King, Raja Bahadur Ram Gopal Singh of Manda, V.P. Singh was popularly called Raja Saheb, an epithet that I heard the people in the settlement use to refer to him on this occasion. On this day, V.P. Singh unveiled his government’s decision every jhuggi resident in Delhi would be issued a ration card by the end of three months. The scene of the PM's address unfolded in the large open area of the DDA Park which lay in intimate proximity to the slum cluster near Govindpuri. One newspaper article termed the enumeration initiative “V.P. Singh’s New Year gift to the lakhs of JJ dwellers and others belonging to the economically weaker sections of the capital” while another declared that “the wretched of the earth could not have had a rosier dawn” than the day on which the PM extended his “New Year gift”.

Witness to this pivotal, yet scarcely remembered, moment of the urban history of Delhi were many officials and ministers who accompanied V.P. Singh. The day was special for many people and for many reasons. For V.P. Singh, it was the first (and what was to turn out to be his only) New Year as the Prime Minister of India. But it was also a day

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1Navjeevan camp was one of the three camps that formed the cluster, the others being Nehru Camp and Bhumihen camp.
2“Ration Cards for Slum-Dwellers”, The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, January 2, 1990
3A.R.Wig, “Ration Cards for Slum-Dwellers: Norms Need to be Drawn Up”, The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, January 7.
4The biographical note on V.P. Singh by Wikipedia does not even mention the enumeration initiative.
5None of the words ‘jhuggi’, ‘slum’, ‘basti’ or ‘squatter settlement’ feature in this note. Interestingly, not even the collection of V.P. Singh’s selected speeches and writing mentions this initiative or his gestures towards slum residents. See V.P. Singh: Selected Speeches and Writings 1989-90, (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1993).
6Commissioner of Slums and the Jhuggi and Jhompri (JJ) Department, Manjeet Singh, Urban Development Minister, Murasoli Maran, Member of Parliament and Delhi BJP Chief, Madan Lal Khurana, Member of Parliament (MP) from the Janata Dal government, Chaudhary Tarif Singh, Minister of Labour and Welfare, Ram Vilas Pawan, Delhi Janata Dal President Viresh Pratap Chaudhury, Janata Dal Secretaries, Sushil Sharma, and Ram Vir Viduri, Metropolitan Council Member Chander Amriti were among those who accompanied V.P. Singh. “Ration Cards for Slum Dwellers”, The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, January 2, 1990.
when V.P. Singh was going to endear himself politically to the urban poor population of Delhi residing in jhuggis in a way that few politicians had done before. With what appeared to be a magician’s sleight of hand, he rendered that day the first of an incredibly short three months\(^8\) at the end of which every surveyed jhuggi resident in Delhi came to possess apart from a ration card, an I-card and a metallic plate or token on which was inscribed a number or an identity for every home. The visit to Navjeevan Camp was also the first of many administrative visits that rationing officials made across Delhi to enfranchise slum residents in a way they had never been before.

No Indian leader before V.P. Singh had cast welfare as a problem of access to documents nor had any leader before him addressed the dangerous fragility of residence in urban poor settlements in terms of document-based insecurity. In his speech, as reported in *The Hindustan Times*, on the same day when he visited Kalkaji cluster, he stated that while on the one hand, there was always a lot of talk of removing poverty, on the other, nobody bothered to address the lakhs of needy people who were not provided ration cards.\(^9\) He added that if the annual financial budgets had “paid attention to the actual needs of people, then lakhs of JJ dwellers would not have been without ration cards”.\(^10\) In what was to be the least remembered legacies of his short office as Prime Minister or even as an influential political figure which he continued to be, long after, V.P. Singh bestowed on these quasi-legal citizens of India a legal infrastructure of identity which was to extend, among other things, an

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\(^8\) While addressing the residents who had assembled there, V.P. Singh announced that he would come back to the cluster on March 31 to see if his officials had delivered on the promise to issue ration cards to all the JJ residents of Kalkaji cluster. Ibid. V.P. Singh’s friend and colleague of the Jan Chetna Manch, Jai Bhagwan Jatav proudly told me how he kept both promises, the promise to return to the Kalkaji cluster and the promise to issue cards to all the enumerated jhuggi residents of Delhi.

\(^9\) He said, “It is a matter of shame that the JJ dwellers have not as yet been given ration cards”. “Ration Cards for Slum Dwellers”, *The Hindustan Times*, op.cit. But was V.P. Singh really the leader to have formulated welfare as a problem of access to documents? Madan Lal Khurana, the BJP chief, present with V.P. Singh on that day, was keen to claim credit for the BJP when he “thanked” V.P. Singh for the ration card initiative which, he said, was a very old demand of the BJP conceded by the National Front government. “Khurana hails PM’s Decision”, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, January 2, 1990. Interestingly, Khurana was acknowledged in an HT column named *Take it from me* as having inspired the initiative by bringing to the notice of V.P. Singh the fact that since 1986, not even a single jhuggi resident had obtained a card from the Delhi administration. A.R.Wig, “Ration Cards for Slum-Dwellers: Norms Need to be Drawn Up”, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, January 7, 1990.

\(^10\) “Ration Cards for Slum-Dwellers”, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, January 2, 1990.
insurance against arbitrary eviction, a fixed ration contingent on a fixed residence\textsuperscript{11}, a postal address and assurances of resettlement on the strength of occupation in Delhi prior to 1990. A comprehensive survey was undertaken in the months between January and March 1990 of all the jhuggi clusters in Delhi based on which ration cards were issued. A document authored by the Planning Department of Delhi tells us that 694 jhuggi clusters with a population of 2.26 lakh families were identified and cards issued in the first of two phases to families that were residing in jhuggis as on 31.1.1990.\textsuperscript{12} A reported number of 120 teams were deployed across the jhuggi clusters to issue ration cards, each team consisting of an Inspector from the Food and Supplies Department, a volunteer from the Urban Basic Services Programme, a clerk or a \textit{patwari} and an attendant.\textsuperscript{13}

The cluster which is sometimes referred to as the Govindpuri cluster and at other times as the Kalkaji cluster where V.P. Singh chose to unveil his layered policy decision on \textit{jhuggi-jhompris} in Delhi comprised three camps, Navjeevan camp, Nehru camp and Bhumiheen camp, each of which was divided into different Blocks. This chapter draws on conversations conducted over 5 months with residents of all three camps, food officials who were part of the 1990 enumeration drive, NGO representatives, housing officials; census documents, housing policy documents, Court judgements and secondary literature on the urban history of Delhi. I spoke, roughly, to 50 families spread across all three camps. I have tried to retain as many original names of the slum residents as most of the subjects were very keen to be recognized. I have changed the names of only a few who could be gravely compromised by what they had to say.

\textsuperscript{11}There was a natural presumption that a jhuggi resident had no claim to a stable residence in Control Orders, Citizens’ Charters and Manuals of Delhi.

\textsuperscript{12}All slum settlements except the makeshift ones on footpaths and pavements in Delhi were covered by this. However, by the end of January 1990, it was estimated that 2.60 lakh jhuggi families were residing in about 929 JJ clusters. A survey after this was undertaken only in 1994 when the Slums and JJ Department drew up a list of 1080 JJ Clusters as on 31.3.94 “on the basis of field assessment and in consultation with area MLAs” with 4,80,929 jhuggi families in Delhi. \url{http://delhiplanning.nic.in/Write-up/2002-03/volume-II/Urban%20Development.pdf} as accessed on 8 July 2011;

\textsuperscript{13}“Ration cards issued to jhuggi dwellers”, \textit{The Hindustan Times}, New Delhi, March 28, 1990. The jhuggi clusters were to be divided into 5 zones; clusters were distinguished zone-wise by assigning different numbers and the jhuggis in each cluster were to be identified by a number plate containing details of zone, cluster code and jhuggi number. “Process for JJ Ration Cards”, \textit{The Hindustan Times}, New Delhi, February 1, 1990.
Approaching the *jhuggi* cluster near Govindpuri

Taking the Mathura road on the Ring Road, Mohan, a resident of a *jhuggi* in North Delhi and my driver on field visits, took a left turn near the Ashram flyover in South Delhi, after which we crossed the green expanse that was the Friends Colony East opening out on to Govindpuri Metro station from where he took a right towards Giri Nagar. This way, we missed the straight road beyond the Metro station leading to the industrial area of Okhla that was an overbearing constant for the residents of the *jhuggi* cluster. Many of the residents in the cluster were employed in the various glass and steel factories, with garment exporters of this area, as domestic helps and as drivers or had to go there when the rationing office shifted to Okhla. The long, straight, slightly narrow central road prone to heavy traffic leading to the *jhuggi* cluster was called Guru Ravidas Marg. This road, catered, without contriving to, the consumer needs of the DDA flats that rubbed shoulders with the cluster, and the cluster itself. Down this long road and past the landmark of a towering statue of Lord Hanuman, we reached the small local office of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) where Mohan parked the car. This was supposed to be the meeting point with my source, Suresh, who had asked us to wait for him here.

Suresh was a man of many trades. He was a dedicated Bahujan Samaj Party worker attached to the Kalkaji Vidhan Sabha constituency. In his spare time, he also worked for a company in Okhla that traded in lubricant oils. In response to a question if he was a cluster leader or a *Pradhan* of some camp, he replied, somewhat indignantly, “didn't you see people recognize me in all three camps? Of course, I am a cluster leader”. In his self-description, Suresh's loyalty to the Bahujan Samaj Party and Mayabehn was enmeshed with his love for the class of the *jhuggi* resident. But Suresh was also in the ample company of many residents in this cluster who all saw V.P.Singh as a tireless

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14Original name changed.
15*Pradhans* are usually self-appointed leaders of some camp; this status, is, of course, contingent on their recognition as such by the residents of the camp or colony they stay in.
16Though he owned a *jhuggi* in Govindpuri cluster, he, his wife and two children rented a house two kilometres away from the cluster. Suresh was tight-lipped and cryptic in explaining why he did not want his children to grow up in the cluster. Yet, Suresh loved this cluster – he would patiently explain to residents how to accomplish things in rationing offices, how to deal with DDA officials, where to go to apply for pensions. One woman asked him to accompany her to a school which was insisting on a birth certificate which she did not have which he readily consented to do.
crusader of the slum resident. *Woh zinda hote, to jhoppadpatti me rehne wallon ki haalat yeh nahin hote, un ke jaane ke baad, garibon ke neta sirf ek mayabehn bachi thi.* (If he was alive, then, *jhuggi* residents would not have been so (badly) placed. After him, we have had only Mayawati who remained the leader of the poor masses). While BSP was the only party to have an office near this cluster, there were multiple Congress and BJP banners waving cheerfully at a conspicuous height close to the cluster on Guru Ravi Das Marg. The local MLA or an aspiring party candidate usually shared hallowed space with Sonia Gandhi or Advani in these banners.

Suresh had chosen the BSP office as a meeting place for reasons symbolic and practical. For Suresh, a committed BSP party worker who simply revered Mayabehn, the fact that a sharp cut just before the party office led to the back alleys of two of the camps of this cluster was an added bonus. The three camps, Navjeevan Camp, Nehru Camp and Bhumiheen camp shared many organic links and the boundaries separating one from the other were invisible to an outsider. Suresh showed me how a road was all that separated Navjeevan camp and Bhumiheen camp, while Nehru camp was tucked in a corner of Navjeevan Camp. But each camp was distinct, in the view of various residents of this cluster. The ethnic composition of these camps even at the time of formation made them different from each other. Each camp was divided administratively into different blocks and each camp was a self-sufficient unit with its own provision stores, meat shops and its own public toilets. Besides, each camp specialized in its own brand of commerce. Bhumiheen camp, Suresh proudly said, “had jewellery stores, garments’ stores”, shops which he eventually took me to see. “You can buy fish in this camp and purchase beer though most of it is sold in black. Nehru camp has, apart from groceries, many *dhabas* run by Muslim women and Tamil Hindus alike. In Navjeevan camp, apart from dairies and meat shops, there are people who lure you into gambling.”

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17There were four blocks in Bhumiheen camp, (A, B, C and D blocks); four blocks in Nehru camp, (A, B, C, D blocks) and six blocks in Navjeevan camp (A, B, C, D, E and F blocks).

18No jhuggi resident I visited had a toilet in her house though I was informed that some jhuggis did have a toilet. The public toilets were in varying states of callous neglect, lacking drain pipes, sufficient water and cisterns. Some of the public toilets required manual disposal of human waste. “There are public toilets in every camp, but they are all *toote-phoote* (broken), *gande-shande* (dirty)”, Suresh stated emphatically.
Suresh and a close friend and party colleague of his started to chat about the origins of the camp-names. *Hum camp waallon ne hi naam rakha tha – bhumiheen is liye ki yahan ke jhopadpatti me rehne waallon ke paas khud ka zameen nahin tha* (We camp residents are responsible for the names of these camps – bhumiheen camp was so named because people residing in these slum settlements do not own any land). But Bhumiheen was not that difficult to figure out as *Heen* means devoid of, while *bhumi* is land. The curiously named Navjeevan camp’s inspiration, according to my source and his friend, was Udai Bhan Singh, one of the oldest residents in the cluster and also among the most socially active even back then. Udai Bhan who will feature repeatedly in the various narratives was allowed to name the camp after his son, Navjeevan. Presumably, because of the popularity of Udai Bhan, the name was embraced by all the residents of the camp and subsequently by the government. But Nehru camp, though dull-sounding in comparison to these other two camps was by far the more political and the more interesting tale. If the other two camp-names had an intimate connection with the residents and their self-perception, Nehru camp surely had no resonance for the communities staying in the cluster? Suresh replied, “you have any number of trusts, hospitals named after leaders that influential people like – like Gandhi trust, Gandhi hospital, why can’t we similarly choose to name our camps after leaders we like?” He added as an afterthought, *Agar mujhe kisi camp ko naam dena padhta, mein usko Maa Maya Nagar kehta.* (If I were allowed to name a camp after somebody, I would call it Maa Maya Nagar)

Suresh and Jahan Singh drew attention to the deeply political exercise that naming a place was. Suresh had omitted to mention the commercialism of naming where institutions or places took their names after the people who sponsored them or whose commercial or political influence had a bearing on the matter. But that was not all. This narrative of camp-naming reflected the playful imagination of the Govindpuri residents and emphasized their subjectivity, but most importantly, it drew the cluster residents into a

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19Original name retained.
20Mayawati was, during the time of the interview the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Suresh proceeded to praise Maya’s work for the *bahujanlog*, women and Muslims. Suresh interestingly chose Maa Maya Nagar as against Mayabehn Nagar as she is popularly called presumably because of the alliteration that Maa Maya allowed.
close embrace with the city. In a context where camp residents were forced to constantly forge their ties to the city through evidentiary claims implicit in their identification documents, this freedom of naming their place of residence, Suresh suggested, was a rare privilege. These camps find mention in various DDA lists and in newspaper articles by the same names that the cluster residents gave them. But what Suresh and Jahan Singh recalled as a moment of agency for jhuggi residents was construed in a mainstream newspaper as a sly and deeply opportunistic ploy of the urban poor. In his narrative where he conjures a fictional sequence of devious actions that squatters take leading up to the construction and consolidation of a jhuggi, a journalist writing for *The Statesman* fulminates that these people having illegally constructed their jhuggis, waste no time in naming them after “one or the other leader” and in hoisting “the benign flag of one or the other political party”. Such a move renders their illegitimate actions legitimate and their houses politically sustainable, he suggests.

The residents in the cluster had very hazy recollections of when their camp or their cluster came about. Some believed that their camp was thirty years old. Others disagreed, citing the number twenty. Even Udaí Bhan, among the oldest residents of the cluster, faltering recalls 1979 as the year marking the cluster’s origins. He and other residents did however believe that Bhumiheen was the oldest of the three camps. While it was suggested back in the day by some of the residents that Bhumiheen camp and what is now known as Navjeevan camp be merged, there were strong objections raised to this because “there were a lot of Bengalis in Bhumiheen camp. We people from Navjeevan camp didn’t know the language, there were a lot of people from UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, we wanted a separate camp”. Later, families from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh also moved into the cluster. So, why did V.P.Singh chose this cluster to come to first and to inaugurate his policy on ration cards and ID cards? At least one of the varied responses to this question was borne out by DDA statistics. Balchand, a

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21 Harsha Vardhan, “Grow More Slums” movement in Delhi”, *The Statesman*, New Delhi, January 20, 1990. Harsha Vardhan writes that these devious actions follow a sequence where a policeman shows a particular site to a slum-dweller after accepting some payment, later coming back to the plot to yell at the residents there, even stopping to demolish a hut partly. After this, the policeman returns to this plot, if at all, only to claim a balance of the payment from the original residents or an advance from a new resident. Following this, the residents name the place they are staying in after some leader to legitimise their furtive occupation of the site.
resident in Navjeevan camp gave two or three reasons. There were fires in the cluster before V.P. Singh visited where some families lost their lives while their houses and their cards were destroyed. As it was one of the most affected clusters in Delhi, it made sense to make a start here. Since, no safeguards were taken afterwards, this camp stayed vulnerable to fires even afterwards, Balchand said. It is hard to see how far this was responsible for V.P. Singh’s choice considering that fires were painfully common in jhuggi clusters in Delhi. So, unless the casualties in the Govindpuri cluster were unusually high, this could not be a decisive factor.

But this cluster also had the most number of jhuggis in Delhi at that time, so choosing this jhuggi cluster was all about numbers, he added. *Aur is cluster me zyadatar gharon ki chatein pukki nahin thi.* (Most of the houses in this cluster were not made of concrete). As a cluster that had roofs mainly made of mud, mats or asbestos, it attracted the attention of V.P. Singh, was what Balchand argued. The claim about this cluster having a dense growth of jhuggis was supported by a list prepared on the basis of a survey (undertaken presumably by DDA authorities) bearing the seal of the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board. Classified constituency-wise and listing jhuggi clusters by location and municipal zone, it records the number of jhuggis in each of the three camps. This list that gives us the jhuggi population (number of jhuggis) of all the camps as recorded on 31.1.1990 and 31.3.1994, estimates the number of jhuggis in Navjeevan camp to be 3122 for the year 1990, that of Bhumiheen camp to be 2244 and Nehru camp to be 1711. While the number of jhuggis in the Govindpuri cluster do not compare with the astronomic figures of Indira JJ camp near Shabad Daulatpur, also mentioned in the list, they are still quite high both taken individually and in comparison to most other camps 1990 in this 110-page document.22 A vital piece of information to studying this cluster was that DDA surveys here notwithstanding, no jhuggis were demolished or persons from this cluster relocated until 2005. This information was borne out by a list obtained through an Right to Information application. The RTI document listed all the relocated jhuggi families classified cluster-wise and year-wise since the inception of the scheme, i.e.1.4.1990, the

same year that V.P.Singh inaugurated his enumeration drive. Prominently missing in this document (that draws up a list from 1990 to 2005 of all the camps relocated, the number of squatter families relocated and the area where they were relocated), were all three camps of the Govindpuri cluster. However, one event that residents strangely did not corroborate, but an event that finds mention in a mainstream newspaper, is the demolition of houses to build a wall encircling the polluting three camps and fencing them off from the adjoining middle-class neighbourhood. To build this wall, the news article mentions that some houses and shops belonging to jhuggi residents of the cluster were demolished. The various demolitions in this cluster must not be wrongly mistaken to be demolitions that took place in another cluster both of which share camp-names. In this regard, it is important to know that there is more than one Nehru camp in Delhi; yet another by the same name is located in Patparganj in East Delhi and in all probability, a few others bearing the same name exist in other parts of Delhi. Demolitions in other camp are not to be mistaken to be demolitions in the camp by the same name in Govindpuri cluster.

V.P.Singh’s enumeration drive
One of the aberrations of this rationing exercise and a point on which the government prided itself was that it did not place any demands on the jhuggi resident to produce the usual documents like gas or electricity bills, birth certificates or any residence proof or for that matter, the surrender certificate of previous ration card. Nor was an affidavit stating that the applicant had surrendered his previous card demanded from any of the jhuggi residents. This rendered the whole exercise remarkable in the history of document production and populist politics. Previous to this exercise, some form of documentary evidence was absolutely essential to all regional initiatives involving

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24 Demolitions were carried out in 2008 to construct this five-foot wall that virtually turned the cluster into a ghetto and the middle-class colonies into islands of relative cleanliness entailed evictions. The article prominently does not mention any of the cluster residents being given alternative plots in Delhi quoting middle class residents hoping that the governments hastens to do so. Preeti Jha, “Great Wall of Kalkaji”, The Indian Express, April 6, 2008.
25 In most of the jhuggis, such bills were irrelevant and producing them was implausible as the electricity they enjoyed was through pilferage and all the residents I interviewed used kerosene oil to cook in 1990.
enumeration and rationing of residents. This initiative involved normatively derived concepts of entitlement where it was believed that every slum resident was entitled to a document and related food subsidies. Every representative of a family was issued a ration card and simultaneously, an identity card. While the ration card bore all the names of the other members of the family (other than the head of family), the identity card bore only the representative’s name and signature.

A superfluous synchrony exists between the officials’ version and the popular version of the enumeration drive which took place in the four months from January to April 1990. In order to issue these cards no documents were demanded as proof. Officials asked for, but did not insist upon ration cards previously held by jhuggi residents, stated Rajkumar, one of the Food Inspectors who was part of the rationing survey exercise. This was borne out by many testimonies of the cluster residents. Officials and jhuggi residents both described the extraordinariness of the enumeration drive where all existing documentary protocols were set aside and where the government seemed to almost recognize the natural right of all jhuggi residents to ration cards. The state benevolence implicit in the recognition of the pre-existing right of all jhuggi residents to ration cards, did not however preclude an innate distrust of jhuggi households and their claims on food entitlements. Food officials associated with this exercise spoke disparagingly of jhuggi residents who tried to hoodwink Food Inspectors into believing that their two room or three room houses were each individual houses. By setting a stove in each room, they would pretend that they were individual houses so that they could get two or three ration cards instead of one, another official Kain asserted.

26The jhuggi resident was to submit the application form obtained from the Food and Supply team which visited the cluster to the Department’s corresponding Circle Office. The Circle Office was to issue the card in a week’s time. All previously owned temporary cards were to be cancelled. “Process for JJ Ration Cards”, The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, February 1, 2011.
27Original name retained. Rajkumar was however not part of the survey exercise that unfolded in the Govindpuri cluster. He was part of the team that covered clusters in Janakpuri and other parts of West Delhi.
28A Manual of Instructions listing the responsibilities of the variously ranked food officials of Delhi states that the applicant must produce at least one of many documents like the rent receipt, electricity bill, water bill, telephone bill, house tax receipt, gas connection, no objection certificate from the landlord. 29 (d), Manual of Instructions, Department of Food Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Delhi: Directorate of Consumer Affairs, 1986.
Another point on which there was an overlap between the official version and the residents’ versions was over the channels employed in identifying the various jhuggi households in the cluster. Rajkumar told me that the Food Inspectors could not trust themselves to weave their way through the winding and jagged paths that were so common to camps and had to solicit the help of local Pradhans or political leaders with influence in the region. Suresh as well as Balchand both told me how the local politicians accompanied Food Inspectors on their survey trips and helped them steer their way through all three camps. But this synchrony too collapsed in the face of testimonies such as Rajkumar’s, itni gandgi mein hum sabhi ghar nahin doondhpaate, (we would not have been able to find all the houses in the midst of all the filth) this is why we needed to take the help of insiders, he indicated. Apart from the coarse dichotomy he draws between the middle class “we” and the “them” of the urban poor, Rajkumar underlined the intrinsically different or the distinct topography of colonies inhabited by the poor where dirt and squalor interfere with a natural sense of direction. When cluster residents Balchand and Suresh spoke about local escorts and why there were needed, they simply offered explanations like the political influence and the trust that Pradhans and cluster leaders (who typically escorted the officials) enjoyed across camps.

Chief Secretary of the Delhi administration, V.K.Kapoor declared, on one instance, that the ration card initiative would help keep a check on the growing number of jhuggis.29 Lieutenant Governor, Arjan Singh declared on another occasion that the toiling masses of the poor in Delhi deserve a ration card.30 Read together, their statements seem to illuminate the familiar story of governmentality where states reinforce citizenship through liberal and disciplinary modalities. But is Foucault’s Western metropolitan story of citizenship coeval with narratives of subjects whose documents emphasize entitlement rather than citizenship? Admittedly, the multiple imperatives of enumerating jhuggi residents suggest that the V.P.Singh government wished to discipline these subjects into legal habits of acquiring and producing documents. To be sure, the preoccupation with

29 “Ration Cards Issued to Jhuggi Dwellers”, The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, March 28, 1990
bio-power or “the sphere of political techniques”\textsuperscript{31} of power aimed at investing the body and regulating the population was predominantly present in administrative interventions such as slum clearance, fire drills, epidemic control in jhuggi clusters. That said, can governmentality, an intrinsically liberal concept, breed in coercive conditions of a postcolonial democracy where enumeration is intermeshed with contingent political considerations or, simply put, the electoral impulse? It has been argued that such regulations necessarily imply “spatial governmentality” or “systematic rationalities of rule”\textsuperscript{32} in the space of a cluster. In an article discussing the everyday encounters of hawkers with Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) officials, the author rejects the assumption that the regulations of hawkers adds up to capital accumulation or governmentality. This article argues that such regulations only testify to the dispersed and contingent nature of state operations.

The 1990 enumeration initiative illustrates how governments had to constantly move from one kind of politics to another kind of politics, from politics to administration in the everyday. If the initiative was prompted by populist impulses to win the jhuggi resident’s vote, it also wished to regulate the residential spaces of the urban poor in Delhi. A squatter settlement spends much time in relative invisibility until there is a perception of a boundary having been crossed, the city having been breached. V.P. Singh’s enumeration initiative may not have been very different. For four years from 1986 to 1990, a ration card had not been issued in jhuggis in Delhi and nobody had noticed.\textsuperscript{33} The initiative followed reports of an outbreak of cholera and gastroenteritis in “the city's resettlement colonies and the illegal slum settlements” which threatened to spill over into middle class localities owing to “accumulated garbage, and the water in the newly paved drains now flowed backwards in some areas, flooding open spaces nearby”.\textsuperscript{34} Less than a month after V.P. Singh's government unveiled the enumeration initiative, it made another

\textsuperscript{33} V.P. Singh “was totally aghast” at this fact presented to him by Madan Lal Khurana, A.R.Wig, “Ration cards for slum-dwellers: Norms Need to be Drawn Up”, The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, January 7, 1990.
announcement — that the Delhi administration would not remove any existing *jhuggis* before providing alternative housing. However, the administration would make sure newly constructed *jhuggis* were razed to the ground.\(^{35}\) The survey of *jhuggis* in 1990 as part of the ration card drive would enable officials to leave out illegitimate (*jhuggi*) candidates. A Press Note of the government reads as follows, the “administration has the responsibility to safeguard public land and to maintain the norms of the Master Plan and Municipal Regulations. At the same time, it has to be sensitive to human considerations, partly in relation to the most disadvantaged section of the people residing in *jhuggi* clusters.”\(^{36}\) Ironically, the VP Singh government was accused by newspapers of triggering an epidemic of *jhuggi* construction in the city where owning a *jhuggi* even on public land could yield future compensations provided the *jhuggi* resident was able to procure an I-card or ration card.\(^{37}\) The government tried to neutralize such accusations by showing how scrupulous their officials were in issuing ration cards. In the clusters of Shahbad, Daulatpur and Kalyanpuri where “large-scale construction of fresh *jhuggis*” was reported, ration card operations were “suspended” pending an inquiry.\(^{38}\) Middle class anxieties across Delhi vis-a-vis such measures deepened in the face of DDA’s poor housing initiatives. In Govindpuri, middle class colony residents reacted hysterically to V.P. Singh’s enumeration drive when the DDA’s Slum Wing constructed flats in the middle of the park located near the cluster, thereby “slicing the park by half” and flouting zonal plans.\(^{39}\) The residents of this cluster complained bitterly that they moved into Pocket A-4 of Kalkaji Extension based on a promise stated in a DDA Brochure dated March 9, 1981 which showed lots of open space and a neighbouring park which they had hoped would be developed, though not into an adjunct of the cluster.\(^{40}\) The move to enumerate

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\(^{35}\)“Inhabited *Jhuggis Won’t be Razed*, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, January 19, 1990.

\(^{36}\) Press note as cited in “Inhabited *Jhuggis Won’t be Razed*, ibid.

\(^{37}\) “Slums Mushroom at a Fast Pace*, *The Hindustan Times*, January 16, 1990; Harsha Vardhan, ““Grow More Slums Movement” in Delhi”, *The Statesman*, New Delhi, January 20, 1990. *The Statesman* cites “a mad rush for building new slums” owing to the policy of allocating 25 square metre plots to residents whose *jhuggis* have been demolished.

\(^{38}\) “Ration Cards Issued to *Jhuggi* Dwellers*, *The Hindustan Times*, March 28, 1990.

\(^{39}\) A letter sent to *The Hindustan Times* contains a petition made by 24 residents of the middle class apartments in Pocket 4, Kalkaji Extension, New Delhi to this effect. “Tenements Sprout in DDA Park”, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, March 22, 1990.

\(^{40}\) The newspaper article citing the representations of the Pocket 4 residents describes their predicament thus. Having first had to suffer the encroachment of this park by slum-dwellers who used them
ration cards to *jhuggi* residents was projected by residents in Delhi and newspapers as one made by a populist government that would go to any lengths to jeopardize the idyllic middle class neighbourhood so central to the sanctioned plans of Delhi.

Policies and measures for the *jhuggi* residents are nebulous, mercurial and unreliable. In 2011, ration cards could not be issued without the fingerprints of the applicant, a requirement central to Nandan Nilekani’s Unique Identification (UID) initiative. But that was not the only factor explaining the rampant absence of valid ration cards in jhuggi clusters. The Delhi government's website informs the reader that its present policy vis-a-vis issuing ration cards to jhuggi residents was to only float schemes from time to time and invite applications for the purpose.\(^{41}\) In Govindpuri cluster, resident after resident attempted to trace her application for renewal of ration card which was lost in the bureaucratic wilderness of shifting ration card offices and changing policies. Three years, four years, five years, the number of years they had spent waiting in vain for a ration card stretched into the regular term of a government before it must face the Lok Sabha or Assembly polls. If ration card entitlements lurch incoherently after 1995\(^{42}\), assurances against demolition without rehabilitation swayed during the terms of the governments elected after V.P.Singh. A one-year period of reprieve transpired under the Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Act, 2006 where “categories of unauthorized development”, a term that covered jhuggis, were not to be touched. This period was to be utilized by the government to “finalize norms, policy guidelines and feasible strategies to deal with the problem of

bravenly for toilet purposes, they now had to endure the torture of seeing a part of the park turned into residential quarters for slum-dwellers. The article also cites one such middle class resident saying that electricity for these newly constructed flats was illegally seized from poles that were used by the Pocket 4 apartments.

\(^{41}\) http://delhigovt.nic.in/newdelhi/dept/food/faq1.asp as accessed on December 7, 2011. V.P.Singh's initiative that extended “permanent” ration cards to *jhuggi* residents could have very well been consigned to oblivion.

\(^{42}\) These ration cards called *jhuggi* cards issued in 1990 were “permanent” cards applicable for a period of 5 years, from 1990 to 1995. “Ration cards issued to *jhuggi* dwellers”, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, March 28, 1990. In this significant sense, V.P.Singh’s initiative was unprecedented because cards for *jhuggi* residents were issued on a temporary basis or for short durations. Even now, cards for *jhuggi* households are not stable; they are issued on the basis of application made through invitation or special schemes.
unauthorised development." V.P.Singh himself tried to intervene on several occasions. Both during his tenure and in his later activist days, V.P.Singh insisted on a basic scheme of redistributive justice, i.e. those whose houses are demolished deserve an alternative plot. His government proclaimed that until an alternative plot is allocated, no demolition will be carried out. However, successive governments evicted jhuggi residents without alternative housing and V.P.Singh was left to protest both the callous violation of demolition norms adopted during his tenure and the failure to respect his government’s cardinal norms of justice vis-à-vis the slum resident. In these spaces that V.P.Singh and successive leaders extended populist measures, the political and the administrative were notoriously intermeshed. Practices of governmentality may be noted to exist yet flounder in marginal spaces such as jhuggi clusters. The disciplinary impulses implicit in transient policies and electorally driven governments which extend benefits that are revoked by successive governments must be somewhat muted.

**The V.P.Singh card**

There is a furtive silence in various official circles as well as official documents about the I-card issued to jhuggi residents, one card per family along with the ration card, popularly called the *Lal* card because it was shot against a *lal parda* or a red colour background and at other times, V.P.Singh card, after the man whose idea it presumably was. The card is still demanded and accepted by DDA officials. Intriguingly, official documents do not mention this card while speaking of the eligibility of *jhuggi* residents to the allocation of plots. This document containing the Annual Plan for housing in Delhi authored by the Planning Department of Delhi discusses at some length the enumeration drive of V.P.Singh. This document mentions that families residing in jhuggi clusters were issued ID cards and metallic

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45 This document obtained painstakingly (through repeated visits following an RTI filed in the Slums and the JJ Department and through hard bargaining with the staff who demanded a bribe) on the slum relocation policy of the Delhi government concedes only the ration card as the basis of eligibility of *jhuggi* residents.
plates. A housing policy was approved by DDA on 4.2.1992; however with effect from 1990 (the year when V.P. Singh was PM), a three-pronged strategy was to be implemented by a newly set up Urban Improvement Department\textsuperscript{46} with regard to the relocation of jhuggi residents where no fresh encroachments on public land were allowed while past encroachments could not be removed without providing alternatives.\textsuperscript{47} This Planning Department document also mentions that food cards (ration cards) and identity cards issued by the Civil Supplies Department were to be the basis for \textit{in-situ} upgradation. However, for purposes of relocation, the I-card is conspicuously absent; this document states, “As per the latest policy being followed for relocation of squatters, the families possessing ration cards with the cut-off date 31\textsuperscript{st} January 1990 are allocated plots of size measuring 18 sq. Mtrs. While those possessing ration cards post-1990 and up to December 1998 are given plot sizes of 12.5 sqmts.”\textsuperscript{48} Ramesh, an official I interviewed who worked closely with Manjeet Singh, Commissioner of Slums and JJ Department during 1990 and who is now with the Slums and JJ Department told me that the VP Singh card was no longer relied on owing to all the allied rackets of manufacturing and duplicating this card.

There were disparate pieces of evidence suggesting that DDA officials were still accepting the VP Singh card for relocation. Among the other documents obtained in an RTI were files pertaining to the relocation of jhuggi clusters in Delhi for the year 1990-1991 as well as a list of all the relocated clusters in Delhi for all the years post-1990. There were two sets of relocations undertaken between 1990 and 1991, Sanjay Gandhi camp near Nigerian embassy and Tilok Vihar (riot victims of 1984). The clerk

\textsuperscript{46}\textit{The Hindustan Times}, “New Department for Slum Areas Set Up”, New Delhi, February 6, 1990.
\textsuperscript{47}Firstly, jhuggi households could be relocated if the land agencies were able to implement the projects on the encroached land pockets as per requirements in the larger public interest on the basis of requests they submit to the Slums and JJ Department for clearance of the jhuggi cluster. The land-owning agencies also had to contribute their share towards the resettlement cost. Second, in case of encroached land pockets where the land-owning agencies issue NoC to the Slums and JJ Department for the utilisation of land, there was to be in-situ or on-the-site upgradation of JJ clusters. The third level involved extension of “minimum basic civic amenities for community use under the scheme of Environmental Improvement in JJ Clusters…..in the clusters irrespective of status of the encroached land till their coverage under one of the aforesaid two strategies”. \url{http://delhiplanning.nic.in/Write-up/2002-03/volume-I/Urban%20Development.pdf} as accessed on 8 July 2011;
handling the RTI applications fished out the files of the Tilok Vihar plots while claiming his inability to retrieve any of the Sanjay Gandhi camp files. He however offered to show files for the JJ cluster of Mansarovar Garden relocated to Sahyog Vihar, Sector I, Pappankalan in 1991-1992; and JJ cluster of Shri Ram Basti in Timarpur relocated to Pappan Kalan, Sector-I in 1993-1994. The VP Singh card was attached as proof in the files of the Mansarovar Garden evictees – files that could be traced back to the year 1992. In Govindpuri JJ cluster, a DDA official was accepting VP Singh cards as proof for entertaining housing claims in the year 2011. In other words, the card was demanded both immediately after it was issued and as recently as 2011.

In the face of this evidence, it was difficult to comprehend the caginess about the card in official policy documents and in conversations with the staff in the RTI office of Vikas Kutir housing the Slums and JJ Department who insisted that this card was not taken seriously. Why do officials today speak only of the ration card as authentic proof establishing the eligibility of the jhuggi applicant? The V.P. Singh card was enshrouded in mystery and urban legend.

In the months following Jan.1, 1990, tents were set up in the open area of DDA Park located at the intersection of Bhumiheen and Navjeevan camps where forms were scrutinized and photographs were taken. Here, photographs were meant not for the ration card but for the special laminated I-Card which was issued for a price of Rs. 5 along with the ration card. These photographs were to be taken either at the site of the cluster or at some convenient point near the Office of the F&S Department.

In an article documenting the late Chief Minister, N.T. Rama Rao’s populist scheme in Andhra Pradesh of 1 kilogram of rice for 2 rupees for households earning up to Rs. 6000

49 I later begged him to show me files for other years though I had not included this in my RTI requests and he grudgingly showed me files pertaining to relocation carried out in other years.

50 Though the prospect of relocation is constantly hanging in the air, no relocation was actually attempted of the residents of the Govindpuri cluster. There is however a small, one-room DDA office in the cluster that handles applications for relocation and the DDA has surveyed the residents here periodically – there seem to have been three surveys undertaken here. I cannot confirm this information as the DDA official refused to talk to me even after he demanded to see my Student ID.

51 One such legend was that the record of original ration card-holders was destroyed in a fire in Vikas Sadan where the DDA office was located. I have however not been able to corroborate this through any newspaper accounts or official statements.

per year, the author, Wendy Olsen wonders whether the newly introduced photo ration
books in AP were not there to remind the cardholder of “Telugu Desam Party’s (TDP)
benevolence to people who are otherwise remote, illiterate, and hard to reach.”
Interestingly, the scheme in Andhra Pradesh for the poor was popularized through various
pamphlets bearing NTR’s photograph advertising the scheme with the term Anna-varam
which translates, Wendy Olsen tells us, with a dash of humour, into both Big Brother’s
gift and rice-gift. In 1990, the various newspaper reports used similar imagery to speak
of the ration card initiative as V.P.Singh’s gift, the I-card. In many reports, these
documents were cited to be a generous gift from the large-hearted leader.

This I-card evokes fond popular memories of V.P.Singh in this cluster of which there
were many like the single-point bulb and the promise of pukke makaan. Resident after
resident spoke with warmth of the leader who gave pukki (in this context, laminated)
cards to the dwellers of jhopadpattis even if he was not able to deliver on his promise of
pukke makaan. The V.P.Singh card is understood to have many uses in this cluster where
some residents spoke of using it in lieu of their Voter ID card to cast their vote while
others said they showed it to get a Voter I-card in the first place, some others told me the
card was useful to get their children admitted in MCD school. This card along with the
ration card instituted, to employ Shveta Sarda’s phrase, “the datelines” of eligibility to a
plot to jhuggi residents where those who were in occupation of a jhuggi on government
land previous to 1990 were issued plots measuring 18 sq kilometres while those who
occupied a plot after 1990 but before 1998 were issued plots of 12.5 square kilometres.
Being able to produce the I-card made a difference to the plot size jhuggi residents were
ensured. The V.P.Singh cards were all issued in 1990 during his brief one-year tenure as
PM. These documents transcribed the eligibility of the cardholder in a temporal sense – to

54Ibid, 1598
55\textit{Jhuggi} jhopri could light a single-point bulb in their houses after V.P.Singh’s government came to
power.
56“A survey marks a date through which your life has a before and after in a city; this date inserts itself
into how one narrates one’s time, and life events, in future surveys. To belong to the city is to inhabit a
matrix of such datelines”, writes Sarda. Shveta Sarda et al, “Documents and Datelines: The Making
and Unmaking of Urban Settlements”, \textit{Sensor-Census-Censor: An International Colloquium on
be enumerated a V.P.Singh cardholder was to be acknowledged as a resident of Delhi prior to 1990. And so, it was really important not to lose them or to let them fall into the wrong hands. Owing to the high stakes involved, these cards were sought and made, and transferred. Tarang\(^{57}\), a resident and one-time Pradhan of Navjeevan camp was the only jhuggi resident who admitted to getting this card made through a local Dalal in a bold, courageous and yet intensely troubling account of the role she played and the influence she enjoyed in the cluster. Tarang got the V.P.Singh card made for her daughter who got married and eventually moved out of the cluster. But since Tarang was not sure of the security she (her daughter) would enjoy outside the cluster, she wanted her daughter to be able to enjoy the same prospective privilege she (Tarang) enjoyed.\(^{58}\) The fee she paid to the dalal to get the card made was a whopping 6000 rupees. She was able to afford this fee through income earned in a dangerous career as a rough and tough Pradhan. Tarang had, back in 1990, a family of two sons, one daughter and a husband, a railway worker who was away most of the time. She was a Pradhan, an informal title that certain individuals in each camp earned for themselves through the personal assistance they rendered to residents. Her ability to help camp residents procure access to information about welfare schemes and programmes, her familiarity with the who’s who of basti or cluster politicians and her initiative in organizing events and meetings of common interest to the camp were all instrumental to gaining fame as a Pradhan. A cluster leader on the other hand, had attached to him or her an equally informal status and it meant all the things that the title of the Pradhan did, with the difference that the recognition he or she enjoyed was across the camps.

The roles played by Tarang, a Pradhan in her day and Suresh who was a cluster leader could not have been more starkly different. Suresh was no doubt recognized in all the camps as the man to approach when it came to sticky documentary procedure. A woman once approached Suresh, asking him to accompany them to pay fees to get her child admitted in a relatively expensive school. Some people got their ration cards made with his assistance. Rekha, a resident of Navjeevan camp complained to him

\(^{57}\)Name changed.

\(^{58}\)Tarang was convinced that the DDA survey-wallahs would give her a plot someday on the strength of the V.P.Singh card and that the card held out a promise of better housing for its holders.
bitterly about the irregular rations she was getting in the local FPS dukaan. To the latter, Suresh explained carefully, with seasoned craft and acquired thoughtfulness, *tum FPS dukan pauhanchte hi wahan se (Food) Inspector ko phone milana aur complain karna*. Woh sunte hi, FPS dukaanwallah ko jhatka lagega aur woh shayad rations desakta he tumhe. (First get to the FPS and from there, call up the Food Inspector and complain to him about your problem (implied here: within the earshot of the FPS dealer). That might jolt the FPS dealer into giving you the rations.) Suresh preferred to do things cautiously, gauging, calculating risk and weighing chances of positive response; he attempted to make veiled threats rather than risk direct confrontation. He could never be involved in getting V.P.Singh cards made owing to the high political hazards it entailed\(^59\). Tarang’s style could not be more different. The kind of assistance she was known to proffer also set her apart from Suresh as a more risky player. She got *pukki jhuggiyaan* made for residents, she helped people get married and even arranged to get a neighbour cremated. But to manage all these things, she handled\(^60\) policemen, threatened politicians, roughed up residents and took on a whole lot of people. *Aur thode paise, aise madad karne ke baad, mein bhi leti thi.* (I used to take a little money for myself after offering such help.) Tarang once helped her neighbour, a blind woman who had lost a relative in an accident involving a rash bus driver. It became a police case and Tarang had to help with getting the body back from the police and in arranging the funeral. Tarang arm-twisted Chander Prakash, a BJP leader who was keen to have the cluster’s vote in local elections, into paying for the *daphan aur kriya karam* (the cremation and the (Hindu) funeral rites). She also arranged for the government to pay her neighbour some compensation for the relative’s death. *Aur yeh sab karne ke baad, ek hazaar us aurat se le liya.* (I took a thousand from her after helping her with all this). Tarang who was earlier associated with the Congress and who now claimed to be working at the local constituency level for the BJP would not pay any bills for the house, for water, for electricity or anything

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\(^{59}\)He also chided me a couple of times for bringing up the topic so often in conversations with residents and refused to take me to talk to *dalals* he had caught in the act of getting these cards made.

\(^{60}\)It is with great sense of misgiving that I use the word here as it was difficult to believe that this wiry even if outspoken woman could seriously pose a threat to a baton-wielding policeman.
– she bought everything with the informal help she rendered to people. This was how she paid for the V.P.Singh card.

At this point, Surinder, a resident of Nehru camp who was listening to Suresh and Tarang talk, couldn’t contain himself, claiming that he had seen a dalal prepare these V.P.Singh cards. He wanted to narrate to the others the dalals’ process of manufacturing the card. This process, was marked, by artisanship, playfulness and a colourful imagination all encapsulated in Suresh’s deployment of the phrase, kalakari that underlay the making of these cards. Their descriptions were resonant with the phrase “artisan-like inventiveness”61 – a phrase that Michel Certeau uses in describing the creative possibilities in everyday practice. Suresh, Surinder and Tarang pieced together the manufacturing process, a process which to their minds was much less dreary and cut-and-dried than what they imagined were the methods of the official printers of the Civil Supplies Department. This is the flaky narrative of the manufacturing process that these three self-confessed witnesses conjured,

The ink used in printing the V.P.Singh cards is quite commonly available. Now, what information does the card mention? The name, s/w/o, number of person in the family, address, signature, thumb-imprint of card-holder, date of issue and signature of the issuing authority. Now, all this information except the signature of the issuing authority can be furnished by the card-holder himself. As for the signature, you need to take two or three sample copies and simply copy the signature in any one of these copies. There was no one authority who signed all the V.P.Singh cards. The clerk in charge on that day would have signed. How will the authorities know the signatures of all the clerks? What next? The photo, of course. Here, how difficult will it be for a skilled photographer to shoot a picture against a lal parda (a red curtain or background)? The really risky part is issuing a serial number. Chance lekar number print kar deta he. (The dalal takes a chance and prints a number). If the number clashes with some other card, then God help the man or woman who got the card made, yeh hi unka method he (this is the method of the Dalal). Now comes the part involving the kalakari, the card inside as well as the polythene cover outside used to laminate the card must both look old. Card ko mitthi me khoob ragadte hein. Thoda purana is se to dikh jayega. (The card is tossed around in sand or soil. This way, it will get an old look). As for the panni (polythene), halke se aag kisi paper ko ya kisi aur patli cheez ko jalate huye panni ko us aag ke oopar rakhte hein. Dhuvaan nikalne ke vaje se woh panni thoda kharab dikhega. (The fumes from burning

61 Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, op.cit, xvii.
the polythene slightly by holding it above a gentle fire lit to paper or any other (easily inflammable) light material will lend a slightly damaged look to the polythene cover. After all this, the Dalal advises the person kisi sadi ke pallu me card ko baandhke rakhna. The Dalal tells the person who is getting the card made to tie the card in the corners of a sari (that his wife or a female relative is wearing) or to fold it in a purse.

This astonishing narrative that was partly constructed out of their first-hand encounters with dalals, though bits of it may have been imagined more than witnessed, underwrote several things. In contrasting the government process62 with the dalals’ process, Suresh, Tarang and Surinder emphasized that the latter process of making a V.P.Singh card was never really complete. After the dalal made the card, the person who bought the card, was expected to do or keep doing what was necessary to give the manufactured card the authentic look.63 It is easy to be misled into thinking that making these cards as well as getting them made was somehow liberating for cluster residents if one were to forget exactly how expensive these cards were or “the intense risk” slum residents took in presenting a card like this, to use the words of Shveta Sarda, the translator of Trickster City64.

While the three of them pitched in to construct this narrative, Tarang, Suresh and Surinder each related to the manufacturing process differently. There was however one point of agreement between all three. Tarang, Suresh and Surinder, while they did not deem the making of the cards or the buying of these cards per se wrong or reproachable, did however find the discriminatory attitude of the dalals highly unethical. There is a wild variation in the rates at which these cards are made, they told me, the dalals demand Rs. 6000 from someone who looks masoom (innocent); agar woh card lene wallah bhi badmaash dikhta he, rate thoda kum kar dete hein, teen hazaar ke kareeb (if the customer looks wily, then they slash the rates to something like Rs. 3000), aur agar customer thamki dene wallah ho, phir to shayad us ka rate 1500

62I am more comfortable saying “the government process” rather than “the original process” owing to the latter term’s connotations of legality as the preserve of a sovereign state.
63This seemed far from being the case with government printers who prepared the card step by step, there was a starting point and a finish point; the point of issue of the card was also the point where the card was deemed finished.
64In an interview I conducted in the month of March 2011, Shveta exhorted me again and again to highlight the intelligence in the gambles and struggles of slum residents.
hoga. (and if the customer is the threatening type, then the rate may be no higher than 1500). They thus singled out this psychological dimension of the dalal for rebuke while placing the fact of manufacture within a larger context of justice.

While for someone like Surinder, who said he himself never got such a card made and never spent any money over it, the card was manufactured because of the high stakes involved, for Suresh, the process was incriminating of the food establishment in more senses than one. Why create an artificial divide between communities who had come to Delhi previous to and post 1990, he asked me. Suresh also gave a twist to the story through this construction,

I saw a stack of blank VP Singh cards without photos attached to them in a kirana store. You see, VP Singh cards are a side-business for these dalals, they own grocery shops, or trade legally in something or the other apart from getting these cards made. Now, this dalal who I know personally, when he saw me see the cards, made a move to hide them away. This is a risky business for them too. If you ask me why they take so much money to make the cards, I would say, if he gets caught, he can at least arrange for his own bail. (laughs)

Though he laughed at the prospect, Suresh cast the whole affair within everyday life in the cluster which he hints as being intrinsically violent, where card-manufacturing was a means of complementing one’s income. Tarang, on the other hand, found the process more acceptable, even if she and not Suresh or Surinder spent money and got the card made, she saw the card as insuring the family in the event of death or displacement. “My daughter will have some security even if I die or go away from this jhuggi”, she told me. Ironically, all three of them, Tarang, Suresh and Surinder make the same commonsensical yet poignant point about the moolya or the value of these cards that officials make; if the stakes involved for the official was sanctioning a bigger plot, for the jhuggi resident, it was to be able to own a plot he or she may never be able to afford.

Documents evoked angst among residents who perceived their importance within “spheres of exchange values”\(^6\). Residents were aware that a document like the V.P.Singh card circulated within “cultural systems of classification”.\(^6\) In other words,

\(^6\)Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things”, op.cit, 70
\(^6\)Ibid, 70.
they knew that those with a certain type of document would enjoy more consideration than those who lacked them. Claims for plots were commoditized where every claimant’s application had more value if it contained the right kind of supporting documents. Nobody illustrated the card’s moolya better than Babita, a resident of the cluster who told me how her son who she had asked to make copies of the V.P. Singh card dropped it on the way and this way lost it. Babita’s husband immediately enquired to know what one does in the event of losing a card from a Pradhan he knew in their camp. On being told that an FIR was the done thing in these respects, her husband hastily went to a police-station, where he had to bribe his way into getting the FIR done for 500 rupees. Fear, hope and despair were all writ large on Babita’s face in narrating all this to me for she didn’t know if this was good enough in the case of the V.P.Singh card which was a one-off business, there was no precedent or antecedent to the card. She articulated to me her worst fears – who was to know if the DDA people accepted that the FIR was as good as the card, or even if they did, if they (Babita’s family) would be deemed eligible to a lesser plot size than the card-holders? Considering also that there were so many DDA surveys and no real attempt to actually issue plots, was Babita’s money wasted?

Many residents in the cluster reacted indignantly in response to the question, did they feel the need to get the V.P. Singh card made. For such persons, it was a matter of deep pride that they or their parents were among the older residents in the cluster; hence they never needed to stoop as low as to make a naqli card. Bhuvi Devi, a resident of Nehru camp, said her son was issued a VP Singh card in 1990, said in emphatic tones, “I have been staying here from 1980, why would I need a dalal? Only those who came here after 1990 would need to approach a dalal and get a card made.” All these constructions contained an assertion of what constituted a just entitlement. If those who

67 Name changed.
68 To be sure, Babita could produce a photocopy of her original VP Singh card, but this was going to be hardly any proof, she feared, for the DDA official.
69 It may be dubious that the son of this woman who looked no older than 50 rather than her husband should be issued the card considering that her husband who worked as electrician was alive and around in the cluster in 1990. The V.P.Singh card, was, as far as I had heard, from DDA officials and those in the slum cluster of course, issued, usually to the older members of the family. But I chose not to disbelieve Bhuvi Devi as I had come across no rule which stated that VP Singh cards were to be issued only to the oldest male or female in the family.
settled down in the cluster before 1990 believed that they had justly earned their entitlement to alternate housing (if and when demolitions were carried out), somebody else like Tarang believed it unjust for the government to deny her daughter a housing entitlement on flimsy administrative grounds. It was because they operated with core principles of just entitlement that they were able to ethically distinguish between various forms of illegality (it was alright for the dalal to make cards for certain kinds of people who are entitled to them but not others, for instance) These various constructions of what constituted a just entitlement contained tensions provoked by the V.P. Singh initiative between various families residing within the cluster.

Ramachandran, a resident of Navjeevan camp and a bearer of the Jan Chetna Manch card, is fiercely loyal to the memory of V.P. Singh. He spoke in a mixture of Hindi and Tamil. He was not just incensed by the insinuation that he had got the V.P. Singh card made. For Ramachandran, the V.P. Singh card had a deep symbolic value. *Naa card vechukarattukku karaname V.P.Singh taan. Inda cardukku oru prayojanamum illattalam naa idai bhadrama padakappoda vechuppen. Yen pasangalukkum solluven yen nyabararthama inda cardai vechukkonnu. Avungalukku V.P.Singh terinjo teriyamalo irukkalam* (The only reason I preserved this card is V.P. Singh. Even if this card becomes useless, I will keep this card. I will ask my children to keep this card in my memory. They may or may not know V.P. Singh) He added that he would drive away and maybe even report any dalals he came across to the police. To illustrate his credibility, he narrated this story in a hodgepodge of Hindi and Tamil

My wife and I lost our elder son early on. We therefore decided to adopt a Telugu girl. We taught her to speak Tamil, she was very attached to us. Few years back, she developed complications in her kidney and had to undergo dialysis. We took her to Safdarjang Hospital 7 times in a month, we had to do this for several months. We had to spend over one and a half lakh over the treatment there. But the girl didn’t survive. But let me tell you even when it strained every bit of my

70Name retained. Ramachandran was one of the first Tamil migrants who settled in this cluster, he told me there were at least 20 other families who came to the cluster, many of whom came to know about vacant plots or houses only through Ramachandran. Ramachandran himself had moved a little more than 20 years back, but he came to Delhi much before this. He first used to stay near Connaught Place working in a canteen which catered to the staff of a nearby bank. He moved into the cluster with his family only in 1989 where he today runs a kirana shop which sells various dals or grams, rice and other provisions.
income, I never once asked anybody in my jhuggi for any money. In fact, many netolog offered me money but I refused to touch their money. This is why the dalals know I cannot be tempted to commit fraud and make a card.

The V.P. Singh card was nothing short of a nostalgic testament for Ramachandran that was worth keeping for the warm memories it conjured of the leader. Like so many others in the cluster, Ramachandran spoke in worshipful tones about V.P. Singh. **Woh to gareeb neta tha.** His phrasing of gareeb neta was interesting, while he meant leader of and for the poor, the syntax he employed rendered it poor leader. Interestingly, Suresh repeated similar sentiments when he said that his government fell because his allies and his wife did not like it when V.P. Singh looted them to help the poor. V.P. Singh never denied a poor man anything, Ramachandran implied, even if he had to go out of his way to get it done. “I knew a lady who was suffering from TB who had to move out of the cluster when VP Singh issued ID cards and ration cards in the cluster. When she came back, she desperately wanted a ration card. I took her to V.P. Singh’s residence and explained the problem to him. He got the card made for her very soon.”

Another man conscientious, but more visibly so, about the VP Singh card was Udai Bhan. While Udai Bhan had no great nostalgia for the VP Singh card, he was hugely concerned that when the time came for the DDA officials to actually identify persons to issue plots, there would be injustice done to those who had the cards issued in 1990 while those with fake VP Singh cards would walk away with plots in hand. Udai Bhan was an ex-serviceman who many decades back was part of India’s Artillery Regiment and was at the battlefront in the India-Pakistan War in 1965. Udai Bhan like a few others in the cluster was an RTI activist, regularly filed petitions, FIRs, negotiated at times with politicians, mediated on the behalf of cluster residents and made complaints to the MCD. With the MCD, for instance, he took up the matter of public toilets in the cluster stating in the complaint how the caretakers in charge fleeced the residents even though MCD had extended this service free of charge. Udai Bhan was however most vociferous in his

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71 Excluding Udai Bhan, I spoke to three persons in the cluster who had filed RTIs in this cluster.
72 Yeh log goondagardi karte hein aur clusterwallon ko loot te hein, were his exact words. These people loot the cluster residents through thuggery. Udai Bhan added, “The karamcharis do not take money, it is the caretakers or the people who sit there at the entrance who take money. These people made approximately 2000 rupees in a month from this business of running MCD toilets, I tell you”
activism against those who had obtained *jaali*\(^{73}\) ration cards or VP Singh cards. He was indignant about one *dalal*\(^{74}\) in the cluster, *pehle to sabji bhejta tha. Aaj woh ration card bhej raha he. Pehle apne liye jaali ration card banaya aur abhi dusron ko jaali VP Singh card bana ke de raha he.* (He initially used to sell vegetables. As of today, he sells ration cards. First, he made himself a counterfeit ration card and now he makes counterfeit V.P. Singh cards for others). When asked how he knew for sure that this man had made a card for himself, Udai Bhan simply replied, “I am one of the oldest residents here. I know every person who stayed in the cluster before 1990. This *dalal* came to the cluster after 1990 and bought a plot from a resident here who sold it and went away. If he came after 1990, how come he has a VP Singh card?”

And so, Udai Bhan, Suresh, Tarang, Surinder, Babita, Ramachandran all perceived the card or related to the V.P. Singh card in sharply different ways. If their perceptions or their interpretations were rooted in personal experience, some of them having bought or watched the card being bought, they were equally informed by their ethical predispositions. But all their narratives were deeply incriminating of welfare practice; they cited sound reasons showing the enumerative machinery to be deeply compromised. The official silences around the V.P. Singh card deepened with passing years and officials were reluctant to admit this card as valid proof even though the card was accepted in DDA offices. During a conversation with some residents in Bhumihem camp who brought up the issue of *dalals*, Suresh suddenly blurted out, “why do you think these *dalals* feel so free to make cards? There is no existing record of the names of the card-holders. The only record of the VP Singh cardholders was destroyed in a fire in Vikas Sadan.” If Suresh’s claim were proved true, it would point to a colossal lack of official credibility. And even if the particulars of this catastrophic incident (i.e. the fire) were not true, Suresh had pointed to a visible lapse of record-keeping by alluding to DDA’s tone and manner of interrogation. It would be

\(^{73}\)The word *jaali* in hindi translates into counterfeit and jaali ration cards would translate into counterfeit ration cards. Udai Bhan does not use the word *naqli* or fake ration card. Different cluster residents use different words to refer to the practice of making VP Singh cards – *naqli* (fake) but also *fargi* (forged) and *jaali* (counterfeit).

\(^{74}\)Though Udai Bhan mentions the name and even showed me a copy of this *dalal’s* manufactured card, I would like to reproduce neither the name nor the copy of the manufactured card.
appropriate here to narrate a strange encounter in the tiny DDA office in the cluster. A woman who was a jhuggi resident presented her VP Singh card to the official sitting in the DDA office. She (the official) took one look at the card and threw it on the face of the woman, saying, “you think I will fall for this? You think I can’t see that the card looks new? When was the VP Singh card made?” (and when did you make this card – a question she didn’t ask but left hanging in the air) The official could only gauge the fakeness of the card presumably because she had no credible means to establish this fact as there was no surviving record to compare it with.

### The social life of the ration card

A common sight in the cluster was men, but more often, women walking briskly, clutching some document or the other, to either the ration office, the police booth which was turned into a DDA office, a school, dispensary or hospital or sometimes, simply to a neighbour's house to exchange stories of denial, victory and perseverance in securing, altering, renewing, recovering, submitting a document. Every woman passing by had in her hand some parchi or the other. Every such trip to a government office required homework, elaborate consultations with neighbours, some money in hand and oftentimes, the resident usually went armed with a recommendation letter from a Pradhan or a political leader or MCD Councillor. A resident of Navjeevan camp, Manorama was sitting in her house filing entries with two other balwadi teacher in a record of the classes they were taking every week. A few other women sauntered into her house to talk about the ration cards they had back in 1990. They began to compare notes on their experiences in the ration office or in acquiring a birth certificate and claiming the widows’ pension. They spoke of how their families did not have ration cards for 2 years, 3 years either because they had submitted their cards to add another family member’s name, because their cards had expired or because

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75 I was witness to this encounter between the DDA official and a female resident of the cluster.

76 An official at the DDA office refused to let me talk to him or other officials sitting in the tiny office in the cluster about the missing record of original cardholders or any other question. I tried to get another interview with Ramesh, the Slums and JJ Department official who was instrumental to the V.P.Singh moment in order to get some of these burning questions addressed. Ramesh was the Private Secretary to Manjeet Singh, Slums and JJ Commissioner when V.P.Singh was Prime Minister. He had earlier been kind enough to meet me. But when I asked him about the fire in Vikas Sadan along with other questions in emails which I followed up with telephone conversations, he clammed up and refused to meet, answer calls or write a mail in reply.
they were required to get their fingerprints captured for their UID numbers\textsuperscript{77}. But there was another thing the residents cited as reason for the delay in issuing card – the officials had misplaced their card because the ration office had shifted several times in the last two decades. If in the 80s, the ration office for the cluster was in Lajpat Nagar, in the 90s, residents had to go all the way to Okhla but at other times in the last decade, the ration office was located near the DDA flats in Pocket A-4, Kalkaji Extension. In all this confusion, their cards got lost or misplaced. One of the residents posed a question that like so many other questions was incriminating of the welfare apparatus when she said, “if people don’t get cards on time, will they not feel the need to go to \textit{dalals}? There were \textit{dalals} at all times, but the confusions of the last few years with the shifting of the offices have made the \textit{dalal} business lucrative.”

At the ration office in Pocket A-4, a Lower Division Clerk (LDC) offered an official reason for the unpardonable delays in issuing ration cards. Under the new policy issued by the government, ration cards cannot be issued to those who have come into possession of a jhuggi now (he did not mention which year). If they had one in 1990 or even before 1998, their ration cards could be renewed, but others had to wait for a new scheme or invitation for jhuggi-specific BPL cards. But another reason, he said, for these delays or failures to issue ration cards, was that a review of ration cards was undertaken once in every 4 years. This review was necessary because jhuggis get sold, transferred, demolished. The LDC indicated that the official thinking on the matter was that housing in a cluster locality was ephemeral and therefore welfare schemes contingent on residential proof had to be carefully dispensed and claims verified and re-verified in such spaces. This review which was made mandatory by the PDS Control Order, 2001, was in the last few years turned into a biometric review where the applicant was to submit his fingerprints which were simultaneously used to issue a UID number\textsuperscript{78}. Ration cards whose biometric details were not on the main server of the Food and Supplies

\textsuperscript{77}Manorama, a Balwadi teacher in the cluster reported that they were taking fingerprints even of children (5 years and above) in the cluster.

\textsuperscript{78}F.No.3 (1)/2009/P&C/488, circular obtained on request from the Food and Supplies Dept, Delhi.
Department, Delhi were to be de-activated on 15th January 2010, a fact that not many slum residents interviewed were made aware of.\textsuperscript{79}

According to the women in Manorama’s house and in the bylanes of the cluster, there was a constant tussle for information which cluster residents sought to wrest from officials with or without the mediation of middlepersons like Pradhans and politicians. The residents of the cluster grasped the various lives of the ration card and the metallic plate in such contexts as welfare schemes, applying for bail, using it as mortgage, to help their neighbours, to get themselves a plot, etc.

The ration card, needless to say, was used to claim various welfare schemes other than PDS. Ganga, a resident of Nehru camp lost her husband nearly 5 years back. Wishing to claim the government widows’ pension, she went to the ration office to get her dead husband’s name deleted from the ration card. The ration card, for her, was a liability, in this instance for as long as it contained her husband’s name. Curiously enough, the conspicuous absence of a name in a document rather than proof of his existence was what Ganga needed the ration card for. She had to get this deletion done in addition to getting a death certificate made, which she got her son to do.\textsuperscript{80} Ganga, was also eligible to obtain rations for lesser rates under the new BPL regulations which extended concessions to the disabled, widows and senior citizens. But Ganga enjoys neither a regular widow’s pension for reasons she is not able to comprehend nor rations at concessional rates because she has still not got back the ration card she submitted three years ago.

Women rather than men rushed to ration offices in this cluster, training their ears for information and sounding each other out on documents, where to get them, renew them, etc., Many women in this cluster were in the know of a peculiar documentary practice surrounding the ration card, namely, the taking out of bail. The ration card previous to

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid. This deadline was extended many times until 30 June 2010. Individual notices were to be sent by speed post to card holders stating that if they did not appear for the biometric review, their cards would be cancelled. The Chief Minister wrote a letter to all the MLAs and an advertisement was published to this effect in various newspapers. Letter F.No.3(1)/2009/P&C/F&S/504. Many slum residents were however not made aware of these developments in the cluster.

\textsuperscript{80} It was relatively easy for her to get the name deleted because Ganga had made the ration card in her name or stating her as the head of the family. She got the VP Singh card also made in her name.
1999 could be used both in official and popular circles for a multitude of purposes like verifying housing claims but also to use for taking somebody out on bail. However, the Delhi Specified Articles (Regulation of Distribution) Amendment Order, 1999 inserted a clause that “the authorised document shall not be valid for any purpose other than for obtaining supplies of specified articles”\(^{81}\). The Control Order of 2001, in which the terms Above Poverty Line (APL), Below Poverty Line (BPL) and Antyodaya first feature, also tried to put an end to the use of the ration card for identification purposes indicating that it cannot be used for anything other than the withdrawal of rations.\(^{82}\)

The middle class images of local city police stations in many Indian films suggest these places to be coarse, corruptible and violent and what goes on in these spaces to be arbitrary, unsurveilled and undocumented. The middle class response to them would immediately imply that women would shy away from going to such places unaccompanied and would scarcely be aware of how to handle policemen in thanas or chowkis. While there is no way of repudiating this vis-a-vis middle class women or even urban poor women in general, there is plenty of evidence to suggest otherwise in this particular cluster. At least 4 women were familiar with this practice and exercised their right to take someone out on bail using their ration card. This chapter is not interested in sustaining essentialist differences between middle class women as genteel and female slum residents as used to coarse male behaviour and even partaking of it. Far from this, it may be argued that the women in the cluster who engaged in this documentary practice acquired this knowledge (both of the practice and of how to undertake this practice in unfamiliar and often hostile environments) through various lived social and cultural experiences. A struggle to be enumerated in the cluster often entailed struggles to accumulate the cultural capital that was necessary to be heard by an official, to be taken seriously by a policeman, so on. The pedagogical process of acquiring such capital was hazardous for many women in the

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\(^{81}\) No.F.3(1)/99-F&S (P&C)/119, Specified Articles (Regulation of Distribution) Amendment Order, 1999.

\(^{82}\)The Control Order states that “ration cards shall not be used as documents of identity”, The Public Distribution System (Control) Order, 2001, See Annexe to the Public Distribution System (Control) Order, 2001, *Gazette of India*, Extraordinary, Part II, Section 3 (i). Subsequently, all ration cards issued after 2001 mention that the card cannot be used for purposes other than withdrawal of rations.
cluster who had to demonstrate remarkable fortitude even though intimidated and harassed for bribes and take fraught risks in various situations.

Parmeela, one of the women in Manorama’s house, told the others how she once risked getting beaten up by policemen when she took her damaad (son-in-law) out on bail\textsuperscript{83}. Knowing fully well that they would demand proof and especially her ration card, she took a whole stash of documents, all that she owned by way of official proof of her existence (V.P.Singh card, token, etc) as well as her routine transactions (electricity bills) and rushed to the local police station. Even then, the police refused to let him off…maybe, they expected a bribe. “I summoned all my courage and called up a lawyer I knew then and there in front of the police, and after calling him up, I told the police firmly that I would go, with my lawyer, to Tis Hazari court to apply for bail there. It was only then that they let him off on \textit{kacchi zamanat}” (roughly translated, this means raw or loose bail). “They inscribed the various ration card details on my son-in-law’s hand like where he stayed and the ration card number”. \textit{Us ke haath par mohur lagaya tha, woh mohur tho de hi din me mit jaayega}” (They put a stamp on his arm. The stamp (or in this case) inscription will fade away in a few days). Apart from this, of course, Parmeela’s ration card was stamped indicating that she had exercised her entitlement to take someone out on bail on the basis of her ration card and she could no longer do so for any other person.\textsuperscript{84} A few other residents bore out Parmeela’s testimony about this coarse identification practice. They too had witnessed this mohur being etched into the hands of those they took out on bail. However, Gyanvanti, a resident of Navjeevan camp told me this was not true of all forms of bail: she explained the difference between \textit{kacchi zamanat} which one acquired from a local \textit{thana} or police station where presumably this practice of inscription prevailed and \textit{pukki zamanat} (sturdy or legally recognized bail) which you acquired in a Court where too you produced your ration card but where the bail is less flimsy, legally speaking. Parmeela and Gyanvanti were both associated with different welfare bodies at different points in time. Gyanvanti worked with Asa Clinic

\textsuperscript{83}Parmeela did not mention why her son-in-law went to jail and I didn’t feel very free to ask her about it.
\textsuperscript{84}Once a person had taken somebody out on bail using his or her ration card, he could no longer do so. The stamp on the ration card meant that the holder had had his or her chance.
which had a branch in the cluster as well as the CASP Plan Project, an NGO based in Delhi which did work for the cluster. Parmeela on the other hand was a balwadi teacher, “we balwadi teachers had fought a case to get our salaries increased in 1999. The case went on for a few years, but I learnt a thing or two about how to handle Court and policewallahs during this time, what tone and manner to use.” Gyanvanti whose husband was a tailor who “did not go out that much”, filled in most of the forms and it was she who did the “bhagdaud” (running around) for the ration card which she obtained two and a half years after she applied for it. Gyanvanti said, Pehle policelogon se bauhut darti thi. Par Asa clinic me kaam karne se mujhe thoda bauhut himmat mili. (Initially, I was fearful of policemen, but working in Asa Clinic gave me some courage) She explained that her job required her to speak informally to a lot of jhuggi residents about diseases, water, nutrition, etc. The Mahila Mandals attached to Asa Clinic which had a branch near the cluster made expeditions to various municipal offices (MCD, Water Supply Board) with regard to some issue or the other pertaining to the residents. “We were trained in Asa clinic to take photocopies of documents and signatures wherever we went. Whatever petition you submit, they will ask you for proof, we were taught in the clinic”. Apart from her affiliation with Asa Clinic, Gyanvanti also worked for the CASP Plan Project which had undertaken to provide variegated articles of commercial use in this cluster especially post the fire in Bhumiheen camp. She was part of their team which surveyed jhuggis to assess the extent of damage that houses had suffered in the fire and which inquired into the houses that had children of school-going age. She read her familiarity with bail procedures and form-filling in conjunction with this lived experience of NGO sociality.

A most intriguing career of the ration card in India has been the practice to use it as mortgage. A few scholars have examined this unconventional – unconventional not because the practice is uncommon but because it is not a readily imagined use of the ration card – use of the ration card as something that insures the poor against indebtedness. It was observed in certain squatter colonies in South India where residents

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85This fire, I gathered from reports by various residents, took place after V.P. Singh’s short term, during Narasimha Rao’s tenure as PM.
pledged their ration cards to friends or relatives who were able to use these cards and claim rations that they were legally not entitled to. The latter, were, in addition, able to charge arbitrary rates of interest for the cash they lent. This practice has been recorded in two places at least in India, in Kerala and in Tamil Nadu. In Kerala, this practice was observed in remote hilly areas where squatters were residing in illegal and makeshift settlements. In sizing up a practice like mortgaging the ration card, one view to take, (something that has already been indicated by the very few scholars who have studied this practice) would be to appreciate the expanded, if somewhat dubious, protection that this practice of the document extends. As a mortgage, the ration card not only fends off hunger or starvation but also helps the holder cope with liabilities such as paying off debts or needing loans. This practice was, and is, however, marginal to the legal gaze of the state. The discussion of this function of the ration card in the work of the few scholars who mention it is somewhat prosaic and limited. While this function extends only a compromised and temporary protection that often threatens to plunge the cardholder into indebtedness, bondage and other forms of vulnerability, in emphasizing only such dangerous implications, scholars like Jos Mooij and Leela Gulati omit to read the performative gestures of those pledging their card and “the imaginative potentialities” of the practice. Residents in the cluster use the hindi expression girvi dena to describe the practice of mortgage in this cluster. Interestingly enough, every person who was asked this question shook their heads in shock and disbelief as if they had heard someone utter some profanity. “This ration card is worth much more than anything anybody can lend us in the cluster”, said Veena Devi. “When people are ready to give Rs. 1000 or Rs. 2000 to make a new card, why would anybody want to pledge the ration card?”, she added. “I had to go thrice to various offices in 6 months to trace my card. Others have had to go several times to get changes made. _Hum sone aur chandi girvi de sakte, hamare ration card ko nahin_”, said Gyanvanti. (We can mortgage our gold and silver but never our ration card)

87See Yael Navaro-Yashin’s discussion of make-believe documents and the fiction of legality in the context of passports circulated in Northern Cyprus but not formally accepted in other parts of Cyprus or by the international community. Yael Navaro-Yashin, “Make-Believe Papers, Legal forms and the Counterfeit: Affective Interactions between Documents and People in Britain and Cyprus”, *Anthropological Theory*, 7, no. 1, (2007).
Considering that this practice of mortgaging the ration card was recorded in illegal squatter colonies (whose residents may have procured access to ration cards through political patronage or patron-client relationships), this practice may well be just another instance of the porous legality of welfare processes in marginal spaces. While no resident admitted having pledged her card in the cluster, a couple of them did say that they claimed the rations on their card not for themselves but for somebody else. Babita had no use for the coarse grains that were issued to families in the 1990s because she didn’t want her children to have such sub-standard food. Besides, Babita worked as a domestic help in a house where her employers gave her sweet bread every day which she used to save and bring home to her children. She would give away the coarse grains to her neighbours who gladly took it. “I never used those grains to cook rice. We used it occasionally to make idlis. But I made it a point to always pick up my rations from the FPS. Better that I do some good for my neighbours than allow the dukandar to swallow my rations and sell it in black.” This account turned on its head notions of middle class charity (to their maids or helps) where PDS foodgrains could only be consumed by the poor or the assumption that only the middle class had the purchasing power or the alternative resources to give away coarse grains or that it was only the middle class that had uses other than the withdrawal of rations for the ration card.

**V.P. Singh’s token**
The doors to the houses of Govindpuri cluster were a colourful splash of survey numbers inscribed in different inks. Gyanvanti pointed out to me on her door three numbers, identifying each of them for me, the janghatna number or the census number, the DDA survey number and the number on the token or the metallic plate which was given to every jhuggi resident in 1990 along with the ration card and ID card. This number, apart from imparting a legitimate basis to the jhuggi resident’s claim to alternative housing, also extended them the convenience of a postal address. Before 1990, Manorama, who used to be a resident of C Block in Navjeevan camp told me how her post used to find its way to another Manorama staying in E Block in the same camp. The latter Manorama contacted me in the Balwadi connection and handed the former’s post to her. But with
these token numbers, the mix-ups stopped and the postman promptly delivered all her post to her house. These tokens, and not just the ration card, enjoyed a social life as they wound up in children’s games who relished vexing residents of the cluster by stealing the tokens on their doors when the latter were not looking. *Kozhandaigal inda tokenai parichuttu odi povanga* (Children pluck this token from the door and dash away), explained Nabeesa and her daughter, residents of Nehru camp in Tamil. This bad experience of some became a lesson for others who learnt to safeguard their tokens (by removing it from their doors and preserving it in their almirahs) so as to keep in the census authorities and DDA surveyors and keep out playful children, perhaps, malevolent neighbours and other mischief-makers. Another resident, Kamala was grateful that the previous residents who were staying in the jhuggi during V.P. Singh’s initiative left behind the token on their door when they moved out of the cluster. So, though Kamala has no VP Singh card having moved into the cluster after 1990, she found use for the token as a fixed residential address even if she cannot claim it for a DDA plot on grounds of being a pre-1990 occupant in the cluster.

**The missing individuals in political society**

In her work on the housing and sterilization drives of slum residents in Delhi during the Emergency, Emma Tarlo remarks that the poor in Delhi relate to the state through the market. Her point was that basic amenities such as electricity, water and roads as well as welfare benefits such as land and jobs are not provided but purchased in exchange for votes, money or in certain instances, sterilization certificates.88 This observation resonated with narratives in the cluster where residents said they instinctively turned to political leaders who frequented the cluster whenever they (the slum residents) wished a long-pending ration card application to be processed. These leaders were not necessarily from the ruling party89 and some of them, though members of a party, were not elected to the Legislative

88 Emma Tarlo, *Unesettling memories: Narratives of India's Emergency*, (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 11
89 Ramesh Bidhuri was an MLA representing the opposition party, the BJP in the Tughlakabad constituency. Among the things that Bidhuri is well-known for in the cluster are his efforts to install meters in every house in the cluster and extend cheap electricity. He was also remembered for his promise to get all slum residents a Jhuggi Ration Card (JRC). Needless to say, leaders from the ruling Congress party also made their rounds in the cluster. Among these were Congress MLA, Subhash Chopra who represented the Kalkaji constituency, MCD Madangir Councillor for the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee like Panna Lal or Rakesh Issar
Nevertheless these leaders were approached whenever residents needed help with filling in applications, following up on a long-pending application, so on.

These practices of mutual political trust between population groups and political leaders are captured by Partha Chatterjee's descriptions of political society. Partha Chatterjee deploys the term “political society” to encompass residents with intersecting identities such as squatters, refugees, landless people, day labourers who mobilize themselves into a ‘population group’ defined as an empirical and demographic category of governmentality. The space of political society is marked by paralegal arrangements and an absence of the conception of law in general. The terms of association in political society stand in stark contrast to civil society; the latter deals with the government in the language of law and rights, engages, rather than negotiates, with the government, demands its due rather than manipulates the authorities. The population groups in political society, on the other hand, owe their affinity to violations of property law and civic regulations, pilferage of electricity and the performance of illegality in general. Their collective belonging is derived from this fact of illegality rather than any caste, linguistic or religious affinity. Population groups, in political society, engage in a mutually reciprocal relationship with the government and political parties from whom they are able to wrest benefits and corner entitlements in return for votes. 

Partha Chatterjee's formulations of political society have had such a compelling presence in social science scholarship in India that very few papers or books on urban history or the urban ordering of an Indian city could justify not engaging with this framework even if only to subvert it or use it as a point of departure. It would seem very logical for the scholarly reader within urban Indian discourse to ask if the residents of Govindpuri cluster embodied political society. This chapter would like to circumvent this question by drawing the attention of the reader to a different quarter. While Partha Chatterjee unmistakably celebrates the emancipatory potential of democracy implicit in political society, he treats population groups as internally homogeneous, amorphous and

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90 One such BJP candidate was Chandra Prakash who campaigned to become a member of the Legislative Assembly. He was a familiar face in the cluster promising to do what he could as a potential MLA from the BJP party.
91 Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*, op.cit, 58
aggregate entities. Chatterjee does not adequately acknowledge the multiple identities, different tactics and the disparate ethical predispositions of the individuals who constitute it. Chatterjee’s thesis also does not address the deep affective tensions that marginal spaces harbour where often political affinities are simply not possible owing to the fact of the classification of residents into different administrative communities. The paper classifications that the ration card and the V.P. Singh card introduced led residents to view each other with distrust as each family believed that its legal and affective claims to relocation were superior to those of another family. There was often a breakdown of the political where residents did not organize themselves under a Pradhan or a cluster leader who would, on their collective behalf, approach political leaders. Instead, each family would solicit the assistance of one Pradhan among a profusion of such mediators to address their individual grievances. Often such cluster leaders would not negotiate with political leaders who were not deemed very knowledgeable in handling applications and affidavits. Oftentimes, tired of relying on cluster leaders, political leaders, activists and other mediators to take up their cases, residents would simply school themselves by sharing notes with each other, by repeated visits they themselves made to ration card and DDA offices.

**Drawing fault-lines**

When V.P. Singh came to the cluster, one of the first things he wanted to change was the houses which were built of mud, mats, thatch and grass. *Woh nahin chahte the ki hum ghospoos se bani huvi chathon wale ghar me rahein*, said one resident. (He didn’t want us to stay in houses made of straw) In their place, he promised pukka houses or houses made of stone, brick or clay material. This did not happen in his short term and eventually, it was the residents themselves who had to build their own pukka houses. Babita, a resident of Navjeevan camp, got her jhuggi renovated with pathar (stones) that she and her husband lifted from the nearby DDA Park. Residents however remember one organization that aided in the construction and restoration of houses, the CASP Plan Project. Those staying in Bhumiheen camp recall this organization most because of its relief initiative in the aftermath of the enormous fire that enveloped this camp before V.P. Singh visited their cluster. From the various accounts of residents,
CASP Plan Project gave residents bricks, blankets when this fire took place based on surveys they undertook in the camp.\footnote{Some residents like Suresh and Gyanvanti were associated with some of the CASP Plan Project’s relief interventions in the cluster. While the NGO’s effort seems to have been inspired by the fire, they (CASP Plan Project) are remembered in the cluster in general for having distributed notebooks, stationery, uniforms and sweaters to children and aiding those families with school-going or balwadi children. Udai Bhan spoke bitterly of this organization deeming it to have sowed dissension in the cluster because the CASP Plan Project discriminated between residents, extending help to some families to renovate their houses and denying it to others.} It was however hard to establish if the surveys undertaken by the CASP Plan Project required documentary proof.

In the year 2011, most of the jhuggis in the cluster were pukka, made of stone or cement. Relatively fewer jhuggis were thatched or covered with asbestos roofs and tin sheets. This was significant owing to what the clerk at the DDA office in the police booth stated with regard to the surveys undertaken by the DDA in the cluster. While visiting houses to issue receipts and asking residents to submit proofs which the DDA would peruse for purposes of issuing a plot, officials often satisfied themselves about the nature of the house held. Did the cardholder own the plot or was he staying there as a tenant? Was the house pukka or not? Was there a family living inside or was it an empty structure? These were mandatory questions for the DDA, this clerk told me.

Permanent food cards may be issued, the 1986 Manual of Instructions for food officials states, subject to conditions that the applicant should be actually residing in a pukka house, the applicant should be actually residing at the address given in the application and there should not be any evidence of illegal occupation and the applicant should produce one of the following documents to substantiate the claim that he is actually residing at the given address – rent receipt, electricity bill, water bill, telephone bill, house tax receipt, gas connection, no objection certificate from landlord.\footnote{Manual of Instructions, Department of Food Supplies and Consumer Affairs, 1986, Delhi, 11-12} The V.P. Singh initiative set aside these diktats of rationing policy to issue cards to even those who were not residing in pukka houses and even though the administration had full knowledge of the “unauthorized” nature of the clusters.

The 1981 Delhi Census outlines the difference between “family” and “household”, specifying that a family is comprised of persons related by blood but a census household is
“a group of persons who commonly live together and would take their meals from a common kitchen”. In describing such places as boarding houses, hotels, orphanages, ashrams, this Census deploys the term “institutional households”.

Similar norms separating families and households, institutional/commercial and residential households were observed by rationing officials who tried, often in vain, to disentangle these categories while issuing ration cards. But why were these norms so difficult to enforce? Jadeja’s story of the Congress politician’s son Rajinder (in the fourth chapter) pretending that his office was a house was eminently irrelevant in the locale of the cluster where so many shops inconspicuously spilled over into homes with the living space receding into a corner of the house. Ramachandran’s house in the cluster was partitioned into a shop in the front where he sold various grams and provisions adjoining which was the living space with bedroom and kitchen rolled into one. At other times, houses were partitioned clearly with rooms allotted to commerce while other rooms served as the quarters of the family. The second chapter of this dissertation demonstrates the impatience of colonial rationing officials with the fuzzy entries that enumerators made of houses where they failed to record bedrooms as doubling up to serve as halls and dining rooms. These distinctions become impossible to sustain and even pointless to pursue for the rationing official in 1990 who was given strict instructions to issue a card per jhuggi. Whether the stove was placed in the bedroom or in the dining room was irrelevant as far as V.P.Singh’s initiative went or for that matter any other rationing scheme. In this initiative and this initiative alone, officials neither interrogated nor were required to interrogate the status of the residents, whether they were tenants or whether they owned the house. “No documents were demanded of them”, said Rajkumar, a Food Inspector who was part of the enumeration team that covered jhuggi clusters in West Delhi in 1990. This was perhaps because of the nature of the initiative itself, indicated Rajkumar, where ration cards were distributed in one massive enterprise to clusters which were all mostly “unauthorized”, he said.

Though food officials in 1990 allowed themselves to overlook hazy distinctions and not draw fault-lines between commercial and residential space, between kitchen space

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and bedroom space, they were nettled that one sacred distinction that even this initiative could not overlook was flouted by residents, namely, the distinction between one jhuggi and another. *Har ek kamre me stove rakh ke ek ek kamre ko alag jhuggi bana lete the.* (By putting a stove in each room, they turned every such room into a separate jhuggi) said Kain, one disgruntled official who was part of the V.P.Singh initiative (also cited in the last chapter). Rajita’s\(^95\) house where a flimsy cloth partitioned her jhuggi from her son’s jhuggi would perhaps have offended Kain sorely. A few officials also pointed out how double-storeyed jhuggis were made out to be separate jhuggis where an unsteady ladder connected to a jhuggi wound its way up to the portion above where often a separate family resided.

There is little space in these official conceptions of house for privacy, familial and kinship dynamics or cultural and affective ties. That a family may deem a partitioned space to be another jhuggi to allow their son and daughter-in-law to enjoy personal space\(^96\) would be an inadequate explanation for someone like Kain. Such affective considerations would fall into the realm of the familial in narratives such as Kain’s and thereby lie outside the scope of the household, the legitimate site of policy. A ration card or a VP Singh card for every nuclear family was crucial in the face of gender hierarchies and patriarchal domination. Ranjita\(^97\) told me about how she would guard the V.P.Singh card with her life because it was an insurance against harsh eviction by her husband’s second wife who she feared.\(^98\) *Enna ava veettulendu toratti utta na indhe card daan enakkul edurkalatte udaviya irukkum.* (If she chases me away, it is this card that will help me in the future) She explained that her husband alternated between staying with her in the jhuggi she resided in and a jhuggi constructed behind the first. She was very keen to get the V.P.Singh card made in her name as Shekhar’s second wife had got one made in hers. It must be wondered if the rationing officials were unaware of this bigamous relationship that Shekhar shared with his two wives as after all both ration cards bore the names of Shekhar. Documents, in this sense, extended this fragile yet indispensable

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\(^95\)Name changed.
\(^96\)There were many such houses I saw where the parents apportioned space to the families of their sons, brothers and sisters, treating them practically as separate jhuggis.
\(^97\)Name changed.
\(^98\)Not having met the second wife, I couldn’t hear her version of the story.
protection to women compromised by unkind patriarchy. In their unequivocal conception of ration cards as only meant for withdrawal of rations, many officials missed these affective possibilities and fraught assurances.

If drawing faultlines between a *pukka* house and a *kaccha* house, between one *jhuggi* and another was vital to determine ration card eligibility, it also helped define the contours of housing entitlement. Even though all houses in a certain cluster may be deemed to be encroachments, their claim to compensation or allocation of plots varied on the basis of datelines, ownership or tenure, the structure of house, and changing conceptions of house....and those with the requisite documents to prove most of these criteria. Residents rendered administrative datelines (who occupied land before 1990 and who after 1990) into emotional datelines. They saw themselves and each other, depending on how they were placed, strangely, unhappily, proudly and fiercely fitted into different brackets of compensation or resettlement. Their response to such classifications corresponded to their documentary status - whether they were residents of Delhi before or after a certain date, whether they owned a *pukka* or *kaccha* house, whether they were tenants or owners of the house. Often, as the fifth chapter showed in the instance of the Partition-displaced persons under the Gadgil Assurance Scheme, ambiguity in any of these criteria as reflected by the (rationing or other) document(s) threatened to rock their boat of claims on housing entitlement. In other words, the directives on housing issued especially in relation to or after 1990 created communities of eligibility in a narrow administrative sense.

**Contextualizing the V.P.Singh initiative**

It was owing to V.P.Singh's crusade against arbitrary eviction that we have a rudimentary framework for housing the urban poor, indicated Jai Bhagwan Jatav, a close friend and associate of V.P.Singh who co-founded, with the former PM, the NGO called *Jan Chetna Manch* which fights legal battles, petitions the government,

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99I am grateful to my supervisor, Ravi Sundaram for suggesting this construction.
participates in protests on matters pertaining to the urban poor in Delhi. This crusade which extended beyond his Prime Ministership, as Jatav told me and as various newspaper reports bore out, was to ensure that there were no demolitions/evictions of the urban poor prior to the identification of alternative housing for those sought to be removed.

In their various debates on jhuggis and their place in the urban spaces of Delhi, newspapers often refer to ration cards. Columns that discuss jhuggi-related issues in *The Statesman* speak of the ration card initiative as playing into the hands of opportunistic policemen, greedy slum-dwellers, speculators and land grabbers. The threat of illegal migration is always looming large in these reports – migration both of labour from other states and the Bangladeshi immigrant looking for means to get an Indian passport. Many of these reports while seeming to send out very mixed messages are ideologically straightforward. One journalist writes that there are many things that attract migrants to Delhi, most of all its “open-door policy” to them, “For, Delhi cares for them. It gives them water, electricity, sanitation, medical facilities, alternate sites or dwelling units, ren baseras (night shelters), television, soft loans and eventually ration cards that confirm citizenship and entitles the holder to so many other facilities”. The present policy of allotting 25 square metre plots to jhuggi residents who can prove with their ration card that they were residents of Delhi before 1990 would involve “handing over village after village till such a time that Delhi becomes a veritable concrete jungle”. Migrant labour should be sent back to where they belong, “otherwise, Masterplan or no plan, Delhi can never be remodelled on modern lines” screams one journalist. Another

100 Incidentally, the Jan Chetna Manch issues identity cards to various jhuggi residents which give them bargaining power against the intimidatory tactics of the police, DDA officials, etc. Suresh gestured to this showing me his Jan Chetna Manch identity card. Ramachandran too possessed a JCM card.

101 A report of *The Hindustan Times* mentions the decision of the Delhi administration not to remove existing jhuggis until alternatives for their rehabilitation were finalized. A Delhi administration press note that formed the basis for the HT report however, states the resolve of the administration to remove new jhuggis which encroached on public land. The new approach focuses, concluded the report, on prevention in order to “maintain the norms of the Master Plan and Municipal Regulations”. This way, the administration, wished to stay “sensitive to human considerations, partly in relation to the most disadvantaged section of the people residing in jhuggi clusters”. “Inhabited Jhuggis Won't be Razed”, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, January 19, 1990


104 Ibid.
laments that “Delhi’s personality and topography had never been so destroyed so mercilessly as during these last 13 years” of “political chicanery” where politicians wooed JJ residents presumably through ration cards. Many reports concur that unless civic amenities are provided in the resettlement colonies soon after they are set up, the new settlements will continue to congest Delhi and blot its landscape. Interestingly, if the prevailing middle class charge against the V.P. Singh government was that its ration card initiative threatened the Master Plan of ordering the city, sanitizing its spaces and grooming its residents, the latter responded by showing that this initiative actually embodied the Master Plan by its twin attempt to enumerate jhuggi residents and to ensure no new jhuggis were constructed.

The same year that the initiative was introduced, there were multiple fires across jhuggi clusters – in Yamuna Pushta, Sanjay Amar Colony (near the Old Railway Bridge), Paharganj, Adarsh Nagar, Geeta Colony, Shahabad, Jahangirpuri, Samaipur Badli. Writing on one such incident, a regular columnist for the Hindustan Times, A.R.Wig provides a statistic of 164 fires in jhuggi clusters that destroyed 5,845 huts in the year previous to the enumeration initiative. He also cites the Delhi Chief Fire Officer as saying that the fire was caused by a temporary electricity connection or the tendency to pilfer electricity in these slum areas. He concludes his piece by writing that the Lieutenant Governor Arjan Singh should, through a survey of jhuggis, keep their growth under check because of the hazards they pose to themselves. An editorial published in the Hindustan Times speaks of a conspiracy theory behind “the fires of greed” across urban poor settlements in Delhi where these fires were started by slumlords in connivance with pradhans. The editorial suggests that the residents don’t have much to lose either, as “the destruction of the jhuggis will legitimise the encroachment as the compensation involves not only immediate relief but alternative plots and ration cards too” It concludes that all these players (political parties, slumlords, pradhans) try to make “the business of

106 Not all middle class citizens saw the enumeration initiative as presenting a threat to their way of life. One reader, O.P. Ratra writes a letter to the Editor expressing praise for the initiative as being a step in the right direction to “monitor the growth of jhuggis and slums”. Letter to the Editor, The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, February 24, 1990.
setting the slums ablaze “a no-risk proposition” for all concerned. It must be wondered what this journalist made of the jhuggi resident who needed to set her own things ablaze in a merry fire every once so often just so she could get a document promising to secure the prospects of her life and those of her family.

Conclusion

At the intersection of Bhumihene camp and Navjeevan camp lies the DDA Park, disparagingly termed the Jhuggi Wallah Park in Googlemaps, home to a Kali Mandir where V.P.Singh addressed the large assembly of cluster residents to great applause. No memorial bears proud testimony to the New Year's day of Jan.1, 1990, the enumeration initiative of the three months following this day or the leader who raised the hopes of “thousands” of cluster residents. The space is routinely used for public gatherings, festival celebrations and political meetings and wears a desolate look as if it were lost without the colourful banners, the party flags and the blaring loudspeakers to speak for it. V.P.Singh's address is warmly remembered for the ration card promise it contained. The Hindustan Times captures the public response in the Govindpuri cluster to the enumeration initiative as a euphoric one,

Earlier, Mr.V.P.Singh, accompanied by Mr.Marar, Mr.Khurana and others walked around in the jhuggi clusters stopping and talking to the women and children. He was given a rousing welcome by the area residents with marigold garlands and incessant cries of “V.P.Singh zindabad”. Virtually mobbed by the crowds, he barely managed to exchange a few pleasantries with the jhuggi dwellers. The people nonetheless were ecstatic with his presence.

While this report reads like a typical paean of a pro-establishment newspaper, it must be said that many of the cluster residents had only warm words of praise for V.P.Singh. One resident declared, Thakur aur ek raja ke godh liye huve bete hone ke bawjood bhi woh garibon ke neta tha. (He was a leader of the poor in spite of being a Thakur and the adopted son of a raja) Many of their contemporary models of political virtue such as Mayawati, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Ramesh Bidhuri could only walk in the bright shadow (mixed metaphor intended) of Raja Sahib as he was

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109 Ibid.
popularly and fondly called. Other leaders succeeding V.P.Singh were held up in ridicule for lacking the spontaneity of this benevolent crusader of the urban poor masses. “When Narasimha Rao came to commiserate with the grieving residents of Bhumiheen camp many of whom had lost their relatives and friends in a fire in 1991, he kept his nose and mouth covered throughout. Do you know how the people greeted him? They threw stones at him”, recounted Jahan Singh, a resident of Bhumiheen camp who was a BSP party worker attached to the Kalkaji constituency. Pahwa, a Food Inspector may have exaggerated when he said that he saw V.P.Singh's photo in a local temple but the collective memory of a laminated ration card, a regularly functioning FPS (for a few years after the enumeration initiative) and an identity card to insure residents against demolition drives may have very well nurtured feelings of affection for Raja Saheb in clusters other than Govindpuri.

If the residents of Govindpuri cluster gratefully acknowledged V.P.Singh's legacy of (ration card and identity card-based) enumeration, they also conveyed to me in myriad ways the terrible complexity this legacy had injected into their lives. This legacy tore open wounds of insecurity, threw them into new battles of survival and risk-taking where officials threatened to “expose” them. The DDA official who threw what she suspected to be a 'fake' card at a woman slum resident, was exposing the latter as a fraud but equally importantly, was exposing her to prospects of displacement and discrimination. The enumeration initiative delivered all jhuggi residents equally into a labyrinth of documentary claims in which some struggled to convince authorities that they had merely lost the V.P.Singh card, some waited for the survey authorities to step into their homes, others resisted the unacceptable line separating eligible families on the basis of datelines (when they had moved into public land in Delhi and when they hadn't). Some protested against the corruptible and flawed process of recording eligible claimants while others used these cards and the urgent need for them as profitable businesses to, perhaps, complement their inadequate incomes. Some fumed against the dubious credibility of government agencies which surveyed them time and again without justification and others who having produced documentary proof waited in fading hope for the elusive plot. While almost all residents worded a strong
criticism of successive governments in terms of their unjust policies, the dubious legality of their actions and their complicity in informal arrangements, they did so through everyday explorations of the identification document. They formulated coherent concepts of just entitlement through their critiques of the ID document’s impersonal administrative categories of household, marital status and legal criteria such as date of issue, validity and expiry of the card marking datelines in the city.\footnote{Shveta Sarda, \textit{Sensor-Census-Censor}, op.cit, 70.}

It may be fitting to conclude with an enduring memory from a field visit. Amarnath Kashyap was a man in his mid-sixties whose house caught fire in the blaze that engulfed Bhumiheen camp soon after V.P. Singh stepped down as PM. He nodded his sadly in response to a barrage of questions about his ration card, how many family members it contained, if he owned one previous to V.P. Singh’s enumeration drive, if he lost his documents in the fire. He pointed to a pile of bags, “\textit{beta, meri yaaddash bauhut kamzor ho gayi he. Yeh lo, mere documents dekh lo}” (my memory has become unreliable. Here, look at my documents). He proceeded to untie bag after bag of petitions, letters offering jobs, award certificates and.....identity documents. Buried in this pile was a fragment of the V.P. Singh card recovered tenderly from the fire and stapled on to a piece of cardboard along with other sturdy identity documents collected over years. For Amar Singh, a record of documents of all manner was a preparation for various eventualities, the loss of home, livelihood, security...and memory.